



Bullet Space Squatter-Artists installing work in the basement of the New Museum of Contemporary Art for the exhibition Urban Encounters, 1998



Bike shop at 6100 Blackstone, Hyde Park, Chicago, before fire destroyed the building.


FIDELITY, BETRAYAL, AUTONOMY

In and Beyond the Post Cold-War Art Museum

GREGORY SHOLETTE

*Certainty, fidelity
On the stroke of midnight pass
Like vibrations of a bell*
—W. H. Auden (Lullaby, 1937)

Today, the socially committed artist, writer, curator, or administrator must face one very unpalatable fact - how and why large, basically conservative institutions, including museums and universities, eventually charm even their most defiant critics and radical apostates. If the end of the Cold War (and of modernism) has brought a new level of inclusiveness to these cultural institutions, what has become of the once defiant notion of a counterculture? Writing as a her-

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etic, I believe that while institutional power is certainly no phantom, the institutional function (to rework a term borrowed from Foucault's essay "What is an Author?") is seldom precisely directed. Rather, museums, universities, even corporations are rife with redundancy and internal conflict. Their greatest effectiveness is often more the result of a magnitude of scale than organizational efficiency. Naturally, administrators and curators will, in the last instance, always side with the institutional function, but at any point prior to that critical juncture, there arise intrigues, affairs, and infidelities of great potential to political activists. And if institutional power persists in attracting even its opponents, perhaps it is because we love it, or at least the unselfish image it projects, more than it could ever love itself. That is the scandal my essay seeks to comprehend.

I want to begin by describing my troubled history. I have worked inside art institutions as well as outside and against them. I want to address this space of ambivalence, but I also want to confess a still deeper, long-standing disloyalty - toward the practice known as contemporary art, and toward the increasingly global market that supports it. As a practicing artist and curator who teaches in an arts administration program, this confession is nearly seditious. Yet, like all complex relationships, it also betrays my codependency on institutional authority as a means of achieving what are in effect FREQUENTLY contrary, democratic goals.

I can trace my declining faith in the institutions of art back to 1979, the year I graduated from the Cooper Union School of Art. No longer a student, I began to attend meetings where other artists spoke not about their art but about their opposition to racism and apartheid, sexism and militarism. Rather than visiting studios or planning exhibitions, we focused on supporting third-world liberation movements, labour unions, the ecology movement, and public housing. Art was at best a vehicle for accomplishing these ends. Besides, there was serious work to be done that had nothing to do with career building. Among those active at these gatherings was the critic Lucy R. Lippard, the writers Clive Philpot, Irving Wexler, and Barbara Moor, and the artists Ed Eisenberg, Tim Rollins, Jerry Kearns, Richard Myer, Julie Ault, Janet Koenig, Doug Ashford, Mike Gleir, Mimi Smith, Herb Perr, and Rudolph Barinik. Many were veterans of other organizations, including Artists Meeting for Cultural Change (AMCC) and the feminist group Heresies. Before long, an organizational mission was being formulated that would transform these informal meetings held in Lower Manhattan into a coherent association with its own offices and bank account. In principle, the new group was to focus its activities on archiving and circulating the many boxes of materials about political and activist art that Lippard had been collecting for several years. At the moment of institutionalization, Philpot, then the Director of the Museum of Modern Art Library, proposed the appellation Political Art Documentation, or PAD. When several members raised concerns about the service-ori-

ented connotation of this name, it was modified to become Political Art Documentation and Distribution, or PAD/D.1

The PAD/D archive was intended to be an instrument for expanding left-wing activism among artists. By accumulating and distributing models for politically engaged practices, the archive would serve as a sort of tactical toolbox. The greater expectation was that this informal network would grow into an entirely autonomous system for distributing and exhibiting activist culture. This countercircuit would be woven out of a combination of new and existing sites not strongly tied to the dominant art world. It would include university art galleries, community centres, labour union halls, and various public venues. Work would also be made for demonstrations and picket lines. Note however, that most alternative art spaces were not part of this network because these artist-run institutions were perceived as outposts and stepping stones for the very cultural hegemony that PAD/D opposed. To underscore this desire for critical autonomy, consider the group's mission statement from 1981, in which PAD/D proclaimed that it "... can not serve as a means of advancement within the art world structure of museums and galleries. Rather, we have to develop new forms of distribution economy as well as art ... "2

Today, even the most formal art claims social relevancy. As Bruce Ferguson noted in his opening address for the 2000 Banff Curatorial Summit, it has become almost de rigueur to make explicit reference to issues of politics, cultural diversity, gender, and sexual identity (although, I must add, seldom to class or economic inequality). Indeed, such routines can be lamentable for political as well as artistic reasons. Yet, from the perspective of a politically engaged activist artist or organizer this kind of intra-institutional, liberal ambition can indeed be useful, if frustrating. Useful, because a certain amount of actual political work can be "leveraged" through it. At the same time, this tendency to display one's politics on the sleeve (or via an interpretive wall text) is frustrating because curators, artists, museum administrators, and academics easily confuse the kind of symbolic transgression that takes place inside the museum with the political activism that occurs at the judicial, penal, even global levels of society.

The reflex to make art socially relevant is itself a recent phenomenon (as well as a return to a much older one). It appears to have accelerated following the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Perhaps this is because US artists no longer needed to display to the world an uncompromising individuality exemplified by abstract expressionism. At the same time, however, new grounds for justifying culture were needed. Social purposefulness and community-based art fit that need. By contrast, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, art with overt social subject matter was dismissed as utilitarian or as protest art. As difficult as it is to imagine today, in 1975 resistance to any sully-ing of high culture with politics actually helped topple the short-lived editorial team of John Coplans and Max Kozloff at Artforum. Coplans



PAD/Ds first newsletter, 1981

and Kozloff brought to the influential trade magazine a raft of radical art historians and essayists, including Carol Duncan, Allen Sekula, Lawrence Alloway, Alan Wallach, Eva Cockcroft, and Patricia Hills. These writers dared to suggest that art was not an autonomous expression of transcendental truth, but an integral part of the social world. Hilton Kramer, then the principal art critic for the *New York Times* as well as an ardent cold warrior, openly called for art dealers to boycott the magazine. In what might be considered a virtual coup d' état, both Coplans and Kozloff were soon dislodged from their positions.³

Meanwhile, by the late 1970s, politically engaged artists were becoming increasingly sophisticated in mixing the symbolic realm of art making with the practical needs of political activism. Unlike an earlier generation, exemplified by Donald Judd or Carl Andre, who both strongly opposed the Vietnam War yet remained devout minimalists, many post-formalist artists collaborated with one another as well as with environmentalists, anti-nuclear and housing activists, and community workers, producing a heterogeneous range of artistic forms and styles that directly addressed social causes. Even PAD/D soon veered away from its stated archival and networking mission to make performances and agit-art for public rallies and demonstrations, including the 1981 action in Lower Manhattan titled *No More Witch Hunts*. The Reagan administration had recently passed anti-terrorist laws giving the government expanded powers of surveillance over U.S. citizens. Many understood these so-called anti-terrorist laws as a thinly disguised legal justification for spying on domestic supporters of the FMLN (the Farabundo Marti National Liberation), a Salvadorian-based insurrectionary organization opposed to the U.S.-backed regime of Jose Napoleon Duarte. *No More Witch Hunts* brought together religious activists, a local progressive union, legal activists, and artists. Meanwhile, Group Material, another New York City-based artists collective founded about the same time as PAD/D, performed a mocking, military-influenced disco dance outfitted in hybrid “uniforms” that grafted together standard GI camouflage with the bright red colors of the FMLN. Such reflexive and playful use of visual signifiers marked the increasing experimentation and confidence of a new “political art” that was consciously distancing itself from the banners and murals of the past.

Along with PAD/D and Group Material, a partial list of organizations that operated in the New York area between 1979 and 1982 included the anti-nuclear organizations Artists for Survival and Artists for Nuclear Disarmament; the community-based Asian American group Basement Workshop; media activists including Deep Dish and Paper Tiger Television; and the feminist art collectives *No More Nice Girls*, *Heresies*, and *Carnival Knowledge*. And this list could be sorted differently by highlighting specific projects, including *The Women's Pentagon Action* and *The Anti-WW III Show*; *The Real Estate Show*, an anti-gentrification exhibition, organized by a splinter group from Co-

lab, that was staged in a squat space on the Lower East Side; Bazaar Conceptions, a pro-choice “street fair” organized by Carnival Knowledge; and an art auction to help fund a women’s centre in Zimbabwe organized by the ultra-left Madame Binh Graphics Collective, some of whose members later served time at Rikers Island in connection with the infamous Brinks robbery in upstate New York.⁴

Therefore, when one speaks about political activism taking place inside the museum, as a prominent Chicago curator of contemporary art pronounced several years ago, it’s important to contrast the sort of critical and material engagement I’ve described above with attempts to “subvert the institutional frame” or to “transgress” conventions of representation or modes of display. Needless to say, and for reasons too detailed to go into here, by the later part of the 1980s, the category “political art” had become widely accepted, even as PAD/D dissolved. Meanwhile, the PAD/D archive is now housed in the mother of all establishment art institutions, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. And while activist cultural work continued to evolve within organizations such as Act Up, Gran Fury, and the Guerilla Girls, by the time the Museum of Modern Art organized its 1988 “political art” survey, *Committed to Print*, the very possibility of an alternative or counter-network of affiliated activist artists and autonomous exhibition spaces such as PAD/D proposed could no longer be sustained, either in practice or in theory. Perhaps even more disconcerting is that today, some twenty years later, much of the art documented in the PAD/D archives remains invisible, in spite of the apparently required observance of political correctness within the contemporary art world.

The degree to which collectives such as PAD/D or Group Material or the Women’s Building on the West Coast participated in this normalization of politically and socially engaged art has yet to be studied. Nevertheless, when the terms “political art” or “multiculturalism” or more notably “activist art” are invoked today, they raise for me specific historical as well as theoretical questions regarding definitions and context. They also remind me that history is premised on such lost opportunities, just as activism is a process of recovering what the past has betrayed.

To briefly summarize then, from the perspective of a politically engaged art practice, whatever the motive is for the post-Cold War art world’s alliance with social content, it must be read as a potential site for rendezvous. To think otherwise, to remain opposed to all institutional intercourse, is to assume the most ideologically accommodating position possible. It leaves the institution in the hands of those administrators and intellectuals who dismiss the impulse for economic and political justice as impractical, turning instead to a melancholy exploration of personal meaning or an unreflective indulgence in popular



PAD/D inflatable public art and placards during a demonstration circa 1985.

culture. Therefore the current fashion for Political Correctness (to use a term I despise but one that makes perfect sense in this context) is useful if for no other reason than that it provides leverage for a certain measure of engaged, political work.⁵

Perhaps the clearest way to frame this dilemma then is in the form of a question. How can artists learn to siphon off a portion of institutional power while maintaining a safe distance and margin of autonomy from the institution? At the same time, we need to ask what ethical questions this raises - not only for artists but also for sympathetic curators and arts administrators working on the “inside.” In other words, what is the nature of the contradiction such potentially dangerous liaisons can produce? One answer can be found in the work of several contemporary artists, including Dan Peterman, his associates on the south side of Chicago, and the collective REPOhistory.

Peterman’s project, *Excerpts from the Universal Lab: Plan B*, was on display in the summer of 2000 at the David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago’s urban campus. The Smart Museum is located not far from Peterman’s multipurpose studio that prior to a recent suspicious fire in 2001 included a neighborhood organic garden and housed a bicycle recycling and woodworking business as well as the offices of the baffle: an iconoclastic left-wing journal featuring articles about global media culture and the so-called “new economy.”⁶ On one level, the artist’s project for the Smart Museum resembles an unassuming display of outdated scientific equipment painstakingly arranged on a cylindrical platform or dais. The initial effect is of a display meant for a science fair that was mistakenly delivered to the wrong institution. But the “excerpts” that Peterman has used in the installation were in fact drawn from the collection of a former University of Chicago research associate named John Erwood (the man’s actual name, but Peterman chose not to identify him in his project). By using the history of this collection, the artist is able to launch his subtle process of leveraging institutional power.

For several decades, Erwood had been diverting scientific materials from the university into a warehouse north of the campus. Initially, Erwood’s accumulations formed the basis of an unregulated science laboratory under the utopian-sounding name Universal Lab or UL. This “laboratory” was intended to be a free space in which science projects that were not sanctioned by the university could be explored by almost anyone wearing a lab coat. (At least one viable scientific project involving solar-voltaic technology did result from the work done at UL.)⁷

The Universal Lab was therefore something of an institutional parasite. It recycled outmoded equipment and materials while remaining invisible to any oversight by the university it fed off of. However, Erwood’s free space eventually became so choked with discarded apparatus and hazardous chemicals that it was no longer anything but a storage depot. By 1999, the Universal Lab devolved into piles of Gei-

ger counters, autoclaves, lab ovens, oscillators, computers, radio equipment, plastic buckets of mercury, and hundreds of chemicals in brown glass bottles, all of which were stacked from floor to ceiling inside a cavernous former factory on Chicago's south side. If the University of Chicago was not concerned with this pilfering, it may have been because Erwood was "disappearing" obsolete, even dangerous holdings that would have been expensive to dispose of in the proper manner.

UL might have remained invisible indefinitely if not for the building's ownership changing hands several years ago. In the meantime, Erwood had become destitute. With nowhere to turn, and no cost-effective way to dispose of the mountains of archaic technology, the new owner called on the assistance of the Resource Center, a Chicago-based non-profit recycling organization. Closely associated with Peterman's own recycling projects, the Resource Center allowed the artist to selectively catalogue some of the anonymous equipment and display it at the Smart Museum as part of an exhibition titled *Ecologies: Mark Dion, Peter Fend, Dan Peterman*, which was organized by curator Stephanie Smith.⁸ By physically relocating some of the University of Chicago's lost "assets" back to its campus, Peterman was able to provoke a series of political and aesthetic challenges that extend beyond the immediate art context. As Smith notes,

Through this collaborative project, these objects, many of which were gathered from the university's loading docks and trash bins, spiralled back in a new context. They did not complete a circle/cycle but instead accrued new layers of use, value, and meaning as they were temporarily incorporated into the systems and physical spaces of the University of Chicago's art museum.⁹

If the apparatus Peterman transported to the museum is viewed simply as art, it neatly falls into the now familiar and relatively safe category of found object. However, if *Excerpts from the Universal Lab: Plan B* is looked upon as materials momentarily freeze-framed, yet still in a process of circulation and recovery, Peterman's project raises a far broader spectrum of issues. Perhaps the most provocative are legal questions about the University of Chicago's responsibility toward environmental safety in the largely African American community surrounding its south side campus. The project also brings up questions of a more theoretical nature, including how UL, an extremely unconventional model for scientific experimentation, could exist, even briefly, in the shadow of an enormous institution such as the University of Chicago. Again, in terms of practice,



The cluttered condition of the Universal Lab circa 2000, Chicago.

Excerpts from the Universal Lab in the Smart Museum Exhibition, 2000.





6200 Blackstone smoldering after a suspicious fire gutted the building April 25th, 2001 and close-up of burnt copies of *The Baffler* from inside the building.



what would it take to ensure the stability of a “free space” like UL? Equally compelling is the way that the moment Universal Lab was made visible within the legitimating authority of the museum, it was transformed into both a cultural asset (as “art”) and a danger to the institution. In fact, the University of Chicago’s legal department has since disavowed any responsibility for the hazardous materials now stored at Universal Lab.¹⁰ The importance of these questions depends on how Peterman’s work is contextualized. With little more than a shift in discourse, the work veers between an engaged artistic practice that uses the museum for its own extra-artistic purposes and the now familiar mode of institutional critique, a point I will return to.

Yet if artists can leverage the institution’s tendency to confuse symbolic and actual political action, this same ambivalence can also serve the interests of the institution. For instance, the semblance of self-criticism and a move toward cultural inclusivity can have direct economic benefits for the museum. This has become especially true in a funding climate where guidelines for (what is left of) public money in the United States explicitly call for “outreach” to “underserved” communities. Notably, within the hierarchy of the museum, this outreach usually falls to the education department even if the education department and its staff seldom recuperate the financial rewards for such virtuous work. Needless to say, power and status in the museum come down to how much of the budget you receive (regardless of what you earn) and how much programming space you [get] are permitted to command.

Much of the practice of the artist’s collective REPOhistory also remains largely invisible within the institutional discourse of the art industry. One possible reason for this is that REPOhistory, an informal group of artists and activists established in 1989 by myself as well as several dozen other individuals, produces work that is unapologetically didactic and that appears to subjugate visual imagery to strategies of communication. By repossessing lost histories the group simply,

and in some ways naively, assumes that an intelligent, concerned citizen actually exists and will take the time to read the often bounteous information REPOhistory posts in public spaces. More than that, the group holds out a genuine belief that some portion of the political and social critique REPOhistory is raising about the representation of history and the use of public space will be communicated, even acted upon. The New York-based group operated from 1989 to 2000 and while no empirical proof has been collected regarding this model of what Jürgen Habermas would call communicative action, the sizable amount of mass-media (as opposed to art) press, as well as the negative response by city officials to several REPOhistory projects, suggests that the group's operating assumptions are not entirely baseless. Perhaps the project that best illustrates this is the 1998 public installation *Civil Disturbances: Battles for Justice in New York City*.

Civil Disturbances developed out of a unique collaboration between the REPOhistory collective and a non-profit law office, The New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. The latter provides legal assistance to poor and under-represented people and communities in the New York City area. Working with a team of socially concerned lawyers, REPOhistory established twenty topics and sites that designated pivotal battles in defence of the legal rights of the politically and economically disenfranchised. Using the same approach the group developed in past projects, in which artist-designed street signs were mounted on city lampposts (temporarily permitted through the Department of Transportation), *Civil Disturbances* aimed to mark publicly subjects such as the mistreatment of citizens by members of the NYPD, the legal fight to save various public hospitals, a class-action suit brought against the Giuliani administration in defence of abused children, and the passing of laws to protect women from domestic abuse and to provide low-income public housing. Yet, despite the group's record of obtaining two temporary installation permits for its public work from the city in 1992 and 1994, REPOhistory was first stonewalled and then refused permission by the Giuliani administration to proceed with the installation of *Civil Disturbances*. It required the intervention of a major law firm, Debevoise & Plimpton, to force the city to relent. However, the victory over city hall in August of 1998 did not end the battle over *Civil Disturbances*. Once the project was installed, following many months of delays taken up with legal tactics, several individual artists' signs "disappeared" from city streets. Among these were Janet Koenig's work documenting the Empire State Building's prolonged non-compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Marina Gutierrez's piece critiquing housing discrimination by the city against Puerto Rican families in her Brooklyn neighborhood, and a sign by William Menking that "landmarked" the site of an illegal "midnight" demolition of low-income housing on the lot where a luxury hotel now graces the "new" Times Square. As it turned out, in each case the art was being removed by building managers or local politicians.¹¹ This underscores a princi-

ple about so-called public space: it is never “empty” and simply waiting to be filled. Instead, it is always already occupied by political and economic power that claims entitlement to that space regardless of its designation as “public.”

Nevertheless, these lessons in realpolitik that REPOhistory, PAD/D, and Peterman endured have a counterpart within the museum. For many cultural labourers of my generation (artists, critics, and scholars educated during the late 1970s and early 1980s), the inner workings of museums and other art-related institutions were rendered visible through the artistic practice known as institutional critique exemplified by Hans Haacke and Daniel Buren in the 1970s and continuing today with Andrea Fraser and Fred Wilson, among others. The institutional critique is characterized by work that is less concerned with the formal aspects of art than with the unseen economic and social structures that buttress art’s institutional setting. These unseen forces include the boards of directors, corporate underwriters, wealthy benefactors and affiliated dealers and collectors for museums, foundations, and similar cultural entities. What has been revealed by the institutional critique is one persistent and disturbing fact: many cultural institutions are led by the private interests and personal tastes of an invisible elite, rather than by their stated philanthropic and educational mission. Yet while the institutional critique has directly focused significant attention on this cultural contradiction for the past thirty years, it now appears to provide a degree of closure by reinforcing the notion that the museum offers an uncompromising democratic zone for engaging in civic dialogue. Even the preservationist obligations of the traditional museum are being redeemed in the work of Mark Dion, whose installations have increasingly become less an exposition of institutional limits than a rediscovery of the primary conservationist role of the museum. Once again, it is Dan Peterman’s work that proves the more nuanced. Indeed, if there is the possibility of leveraging the all too conspicuous benevolence of the art museum, and of proceeding where the institutional critique has left off, it is through work that extends off-site politics into the museum, then propels it back out into the public arena. Yet this begs

still another question. Just who and what is outside the museum and how do these off-site, institutionally resistant spaces and practices perceive their relationship to the authority of the institution?

Speaking from my own experience, those artists working out of abandoned warehouses and in basement workshops, cooperative centres, and urban squats believe that large institutional structures operate with a militarylike precision to strategically defuse grassroots and resistant practices. In response, any viable counter-practice is compelled to constantly re-establish itself at an ever-greater perimeter from the institution’s expanding hege-

“Rider Who Ate the Most Dirt” bike race coordinated for local children by artists Dan Peterman with painting of riders by Thasnai Sethaseree at 6100 Blackburn in July of 2000.





Architect's rendering of the Experimental Station re-built.

monic zone. Yet even within this outermost post, at a safe distance from the discourse and economy of the museum, there is a form of unspoken fidelity to the museum's institutional marrow. There is a vague recognition even that the passion that drives and sustains opposition is motivated just as much by an affinity for the failed ideals of such institutions as by any overt hostility to institutional power.

What does it mean therefore to suggest that even a critical discourse that refuses to serve the institution can remain faithful to it? Simply this - that informal antagonistic formations such as Peterman's Excerpts from the Universal Lab, REPOhistory, or PAD/D actually share a pivotal semblance to what they, by their very constitution, must necessarily reject. However, in the case of these small, anomalous organizations, this similarity is based on an allegiance to what many museums and universities already abandoned in practice, if not also in theory - the passionate commitment to explore the social, political, and aesthetic dimension of art, coupled with the desire to transform the material world into an egalitarian and de-alienated living environment.

There is yet another level at which the institution and its antagonists converge. Even the most fleeting and decentralized collective, art group, or political collaboration requires some form of operating structure, some kind of institutional arrangement, however ad hoc or informal.¹² To think otherwise is to naturalize and mystify what is a specific type of contractual relationship among individuals with common concerns (among them is often the actual or perceived threat of being crushed by institutional hegemony)! At some level, both the museum and its other - those resistant, residual, and informal cultural organizations recognize that the centralized institution proper does not exist. Instead, it is constructed within a field of ideas as well as economic variables that are jointly, if unequally, shared by the centre and the margins. This means that activists must develop the cunning to see the museum, as well as the university or corporation, as virtually

predicated upon the collective productivity of those whom it regulates. In the case of the museum, this naturally includes artists, but also the museum staff and the public that patronizes it. To paraphrase the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, the institution is an apparatus of capture. But what does it seize? The answer is the enthusiasm of artists such as Peterman or REPOhistory or PAD/D. And, at least for a brief moment, it manages to entrap this dynamism. (Yet, one must also ask, what dangerous, even treasonous ideas now spread within the institution as a result of this abduction that is also an infection?)

Finally, in order to describe oneself as both artist and political being, or what Pier Paolo Pasolini termed a “citizen poet,” one must remain ill at ease with the neo-liberalism of post-cold war institutions, especially those that seem all too willing to embrace a prudent form of political dissent, including the unstated demand that curators be culturally inclusive and socially progressive. Despite this uncertainty, and regardless of one’s divided loyalties, we might now seriously consider re-approaching the idea of critical autonomy that PAD/D as well as the Universal Lab attempted to establish more than twenty years ago. I’m not referring here to the modernist notion of autonomy in which the art object is celebrated as something solely in and for itself, transcending everyday life. Rather, I want to propose re-introducing the concept of a self-validating mode of cultural production and distribution that is situated at least partially outside the confines of the contemporary art matrix as well as global markets. In other words, a self-conscious autonomous activism in which artists produce and distribute an independent political culture that uses institutional structures as resources rather than points of termination. As the theoreticians Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue, capitalism may be evolving into a circulating phantom in the global arena but

... around it move radically autonomous processes of self-valorization that not only constitute an alternative basis of potential development but also actually represent a new constituent foundation.¹³

Naturally, such critical autonomy could not exist in close proximity to voracious institutions like art museums, kunsthalls, or international biennials for very long. That lesson was learned from the 1980s all too well, when a select group of artists were chosen to represent “political art” within the mainstream culture industry.¹⁴ No, what is required is a program of theft and long-term sedition aimed at rupturing and re-appropriating institutional power for specifically political purposes. Once more, the work of autonomous collaborations, including Peterman and PAD/D, as well groups such as REPOhistory, RTmark Les Sans Papiers, Temporary Services, UltraRed, or Ne Pas Plier, Colectivo Cambalache to mention a few now active in the United States and Europe, can serve as provisional models.

But what of us? Us faithless intellectuals, artists, curators, and administrators - myself included? We need to actively forget the convo-

luted nature of our predicament. We need to break with the guarded routines of fidelity and betrayal that circulate both inside and outside the museum and move toward recognition of the radical potential already present in collective action. As Pasolini mused

*Corporeal collective presence:
you feel the lack of any true
religion: not life but survival*¹⁵

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NOTES

1 For more on PAD/D, see my essay “News from Nowhere: Activist Art & After: Report from New York,” *Third Text* 45 (1998-99): 45-62.

2 *Political Art Documentation and Distribution*, 1st Issue (February 1981).

3 A decade later, Lucy R. Lippard was herself ousted from her post at the *Village Voice*, ostensibly because her political enthusiasm prevented her from writing “objective” art criticism.

4 My list is compiled from the first and second issues of 1st Issue, the newsletter of *Political Art Documentation and Distribution*, both 1981.

5 An example of leveraging is the series of exhibitions entitled *Mumia 911* that took place across the United States in the Fall of 1999 not only called attention to, but provided material support for confronting police brutality and institutionalised racism. *Mumia 911* was made up of dozens of exhibitions, installations, and concerts and help garner signatures and public support for an impartial retrial of the outspoken African-American activist Mumia Abul Jamal who has been on Pennsylvania’s death row the last 17 years accused of murdering a Philadelphia police officer. International human rights groups have condemned his conviction as legally flawed even politically motivated by a vindictive police department known for its widespread racism and corruption. Along with building support for a new trial the coalition focused public attention on the disproportionate number of non-white people incarcerated and on death row across the United States.

6 Dan Peterman is now in the process of rebuilding.

7 Some of those who worked on the solar technology also developed the start-up company US Robotics that later merged with 3Com with combined assets of \$8.5 billion.

8. *Ecologies*: Mark Dion, Peter Fend, Dan Peterman was curated by Stephanie Smith and ran from July 6 to August 27, 2000 at the David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago.

9 From Stephanie Smith’s overview of Dan Peterman’s project in the exhibition catalogue *Ecologies: Mark Dion, Peter Fend, Dan Peterman* (Chicago: David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 2001): 125.

10. Even a year after the exhibition closed, Excerpts From *The Universal Lab: Plan B* continues to haunt the University. Last year the University of Chicago Depart-

ment of Radiation Safety, under the supervision of the Illinois Department of Nuclear Safety (IDNS) entered the UL site and identified and removed four potential dangerous radioactive items. Following this the University again absolved themselves of any responsibility to the clean -up. As of now, Erwood's former laboratory remains quarantined until a final radiological survey can be made.

11 For more on the battle over Civil Disturbances, see David Gonzalez, "Lamp-posts as a Forum for Opinion," *New York Times*, 20 May 1998, B1, Metro edition, and Stuart W. Elliot, "Some Legal History Still Being Overturned," *New York Times*, 15 November 1998, 5.

12 For more on the structural nature of collectivity, see my essay "Counting on Your Collective Silence: Notes on Activist Art as Collaborative Practice," *Afterimage* 27, no.3 (November/December 1999): 18-20.

13 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of State Form* (University of Minneapolis Press: 1994), 281.

14 For more on PAD/D see my essay "News from Nowhere: Activist Art & After: Report from New York," *Third Text*, (Winter #45, 1998-99.) P 45-62.

15 *Political Art Documentation/Distribution*, 1st issue, New York, Feb.1981

16 A decade later Lucy R. Lippard was herself ousted from her post at the *Village Voice* ostensibly because her political enthusiasm prevented her from writing "objective" art criticism.

17 My list is compiled from the first and second issues of *1st Issue*, the newsletter of *Political Art Documentation and Distribution*, both 1981.

18 exhibitions entitled *Mumia 911* that took place across the United States in the Fall of 1999 not only called attention to, but provided material support for confronting police brutality and institutionalised racism. *Mumia 911* was made up of dozens of exhibitions, installations, and concerts and help garner signatures and public support for an impartial retrial of the outspoken African-American activist Mumia Abul Jamal who has been on Pennsylvania's death row the last 17 years accused of murdering a Philadelphia police officer. International human rights groups have condemned his conviction as legally flawed even politically motivated by a vindictive police department known for its widespread racism and corruption. Along with building support for a new trial the coalition focused public attention on the disproportionate number of non-white people incarcerated and on death row across the United States.

19 Dan Peterman is now in the process of rebuilding.

20 Some of those who worked on the solar technology also developed the start-up company *US Robotics* that later merged with *3Com* with combined assets of \$8.5 billion.

21 *Ecologies*: Mark Dion, Peter Fend, Dan Peterman was curated by Stephanie Smith and ran from July 6 to August 27, 2000 at the David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago.

22 From Stephanie Smith's overview of Dan Peterman's project in the exhibition catalogue *Ecologies*: Mark Dion, Peter Fend, Dan Peterman (Chicago: David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 2001): 125.

23 Even a year after the exhibition closed, *Excerpts From The Universal Lab: Plan B* continues to haunt the University. Shortly before completing this text the University of Chicago Department of Radiation Safety, under the supervision of the Illinois Department of Nuclear Safety (IDNS) entered the UL site and identified and removed four potential dangerous radioactive items. Following this the University again absolved themselves of any responsibility to the clean -up. As of now, Erwood's former laboratory remains quarantined until a final radiological survey can be made.

24 For more on the battle over Civil Disturbances, see David Gonzalez, "Lamp-posts as a Forum for Opinion," *New York Times*, 20 May 1998, B1, Metro edi-

tion, and Stuart W. Elliot, "Some Legal History Still Being Overturned," *New York Times*, 15 November 1998, 5.

25 For more on the structural nature of collectivity, see my essay "Counting on Your Collective Silence: Notes on Activist Art as Collaborative Practice," *Afterimage* 27, no.3 (November/December 1999): 18-20.

26 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of State Form* (University of Minneapolis Press: 1994), 281.

27 For more on this history see my essay: "News From Nowhere: Activist Art & After: Report From New York" *op cit*.

28 "The Ashes of Gramsci," in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Poems*, trans. Norman MacAfee with Luciano Martinengo (New York: Noonday Press, 1982). 19.