

We think that Camel collective grows out of a very similar political struggle/crises under our current anti-social proto-fascist government, to what PAD/D then reacted towards under the Regan years. I read in Upfront that PAD/D wanted "to provide artists with an organized relationship to society."

PAD/D seeks to provide artists with an organized relationship to society, to demonstrate the political effectiveness of image making, and to provide a framework within which progressive artists can discuss and develop alternatives to the mainstream art system.

The historical position PAD/D operated from made the assumption that most visually-based artists are not good at working collectively or selflessly because its simply not part of their fine arts training. Therefore acting as a mediator or conduit, PAD/D might be able to bridge this gap between artists and society. In a sense you could say PAD/D sought to function as a supplement that corrected an imagined deficit within bourgeois art. It is hard to say if the model the group adopted resembled more the workings of an NGO, or was instead like a bit of *Leninism Lite*. On one hand PAD/D was indeed non-governmental in so far as we were self-organized and had little or no links to official institutions (including the National Endowment for the Arts or NEA, which is essentially the United State's version of an Arts Council, though I am simplifying this a great deal, and from whom we did receive some minimal funding – see below – but not an amount that could in any way sustain the group). On the other hand, in so far as we sought to provide political leadership to cultural workers who we believed would otherwise remain disorganized and haphazard in their relationship to politics, PAD/D understood its role as a nebulously vanguard one (after all we belonged no party and held to no particular political line). Still, one must recall that when the group emerged at the end of the 1970s, the United States, and New York City in particular, were still in the midst of the worst fiscal crisis since the 1930s. At the same time the US had recently lost Southeast Asia to communism, had just lost Iran to fundamentalists, had just lost Nicaragua to populist Marxists, and had almost melted-down the Eastern seaboard thanks to the Three-Mile Island nuclear power plant accident. Not unlike our present moment today one could then find major news magazines such as Time and Newsweek pronouncing the "end of capitalism." By seeking to focus the ever-present, yet ambiguous dissent typical of artists towards a productive militant radicalism PAD/D's task appeared to be

tailor-made for this historic crisis. I am curious if CAMEL feels the same way about the present crisis of capitalism?

Seeing the multiplicity of projects that PAD/D did realize during the years, it seems that it was far more than being 'just' an archive? What role did the archive have in your activist work, and what role did art have in this context? Did you see your self at that time being part of a bigger movement?

As you can tell from PAD/D's occasionally grandiose mission statements, the group did indeed perceive itself to be part of a larger social and political movement (as opposed to a party or subculture or even counter-culture). This "movement" was sometimes simply referred to as "The Movement," as if its existence was self-evident. But actually pinpointing the contours of this larger movement is not so easy. I would say that PAD/D drew its identity from elements of the U.S. Civil Rights, Feminist, Student Anti-Vietnam War, and the Anti-Nuclear movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The group also sought to look beyond domestic politics. One of its bolder objectives was the forging of "an international, grass roots network of artist/activists who will support with their talents and their political energies the liberation and self-determination of all disenfranchised peoples." Given the political events of the late 1970s and early 1980s and our proximity to Latin America it is understandable that our political focus centered largely on opposition to United States military intervention in El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

With regard to the US intervention in El Salvador and Nicaragua, were you applying your talents and energies towards groups supporting resistance within the US and abroad? Which groups did you form affiliation with? And, did you see your contribution in terms of publicity?

PAD/D, like Group Material, worked primarily with the *Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador* (CISPES), as well as with the church-led Sanctuary Movement that was harboring refugees from the wars in Central America. We also had strong ties to the Health and Human Services Union here in New York City (1199). I would say our primary work was to focus the attention of artists upon these issues; to make connections between cultural workers and activists; and finally, to provide publicity about the situation, broadly speaking.

Coming back to the history of PAD/D, initially PAD, in first newsletter Upfront it is written in bold, "the development of an effective oppositional culture depends on communication." Why is PAD/D archive then not still operating today and fully institutionalized? Why and when did the fight end?

Clive Philpot, then Director of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) Library, proposed the name *Political Art Documentation* (PAD) during the group's initial meeting on February 24th of 1980 at Printed Matter Bookstore (then located on Lispenard Street, just South of Canal Street). But in the months that followed PAD members decided to add the second 'D' for Distribution. My sense is that some people wanted to engage in a more dynamic way with making culture, rather than serving as archivists. At the same time the group's swaggering rhetoric reveals something tragic-comic about PAD/D, something that sets its little-known history apart from other political artists' organizations at the time including Group Material (founded just a few months earlier in 1979). For example PAD/D's ambitious effort to inaugurate a national, even international progressive cultural network in February of 1992 actually took place at a time of severe political retrenchment in the United States, Canada, Britain, and elsewhere. Of course this was also a time of stupendous growth in the contemporary art market. So here PAD/D was, calling on artists to become militant, to align their practices with the struggle of "all disenfranchised people," just as the larger cultural zeitgeist was moving to the right, and when many younger artists were seeing dollar signs. Tragic-comic.

That said, most PAD/D members chose not to participate in the commercial side of the art world despite the latter's growing cultural influence, financial rewards, and global expansion throughout the 1980s. One might describe this rejection as naïve or even self-defeatist, but one could also recognize in it a desire to avoid acting in bad faith, even if that meant choosing an increasingly isolated position linked to some broader notion of radical change. Ironically, by the later 1980s, the mainstream art world was ready to cautiously embrace some types of "political art," and did so in a series of fairly high-profile exhibitions including one at MOMA in 1988. (Let me add that something similar is likely going to begin happening in the next couple of years as more and more large-scale exhibitions take on the issue of art and politics again. For example this Fall 2008 in New York there have been shows at Exit Art; another at the 66th Street Armory sponsored by Creative Time; and at Parsons/The New School. Needless to say, this current interest in socially-engaged art most likely signals an end-point in a cycle of cultural activism that probably peaked between 1999 in Seattle and Genoa in 2001.)

You write that institutions reacted and "embraced" the political movement with some high profile exhibition. Looking today it is hard to see any engagement in institutions like MOMA. Do you think their incorporation of your critique did function like letting the air out of the balloon? Can you see alternative ways to politicize the organization of the institution?

Strictly in terms of what is now housed at MOMA one could describe the PAD/D Archive as a quantitatively impressive mass of documents and artifacts about artists that few have ever heard of, organized by artists who few have ever heard of.

When visiting the PAD/D archive at MOMA we very impressed by so much interesting material collected of socially engaged arts in the same place that all is available on request. What role do you see the archive plays today being hosted by the MOMA?

It is an inestimable service MOMA provides with regards to the PAD/D Archive. Many younger scholars and artists are making excellent use of it. Not only has the museum agreed to house it, MOMA is also integrating its index into their library system to make it searchable online (the original index was on 4 X 5 inch paper cards). From all accounts MOMA has been generous with visitors who wish to see the material, and meanwhile, the museum has itself borrowed from the PAD/D Archive for its own exhibitions from time to time, most notably in 1988 when Deborah Wye organized the MOMA exhibition Committed To Print, (which by the way Roberta Smith described as “more documentary and historical than esthetic” in her New York Times review). The one downside to all this is that the archive has unfortunately been frozen in time so that its content range is 1979 to 1988. This was a pre-condition that the museum placed on accepting the collection in 1989 from the Archive Committee (primarily just two PAD/D members: Barbara Moore and Mimi Smith). Ideally, an archive about social and political culture would remain open and dynamic and would have a dedicated staff that not only would seek out new material, but also locate other settings through which to display aspects of the collection and through which to inspire similar production. (Perhaps the entire PAD/D Archive will be digitized in the future, and then at least the “distribution” ingredient of the group’s mission will be realized “posthumously.”)

Do you think MOMA is distributing rightfully the work of PADD today?

Yes, I think they are doing a fine job. But let me elaborate a bit more on what I believe the PAD/D Archive represents within the space of the museum.

First, the PAD/D Archive was not a curatorial project. It is literally constituted by the material produced by hundreds of artists, groups and activists who sent this documentation to PAD/D

because they perceived their work as “socially conscious art,” ostensibly the only criteria developed for the archive (which is why there are even a few examples of “right wing” culture in the collection since nothing specified the work documented had to be from the political “Left”). Yes, the material was sorted into this and that category (ecological art, lesbian art, labor related art), but with the exception of some prints of cats (see below), no exclusions were made regarding any of the material submitted. This procedure already stands in sharp contrast with the normal collecting practices of most museums.

Second, as I mentioned before, the PAD/D Archive represents at some very basic level the sheer overproduction of art. This is a phenomenon that art historian Carol Duncan once described as the “natural” state of the art world, the glut of art and artists not supported by the market. But the redundancy that marks the PAD/D Archive is consistent with the groups’ inaugural moment in February of 1980. Recall, it was Lucy R. Lippard who called the first meeting together that year, ostensibly to solve a growing problem she was facing in her loft. For months the well-known critic and activist had been inundated with posters, slides, and other documentation sent to her by what she called the “many good, socially active artists no one heard of.” All of this accumulation started sometime in 1979 when Lippard had used the backside of an invitation card from an exhibition she curated at Artist’s Space to invite unknown artists with social or political work to send her documentation. And they did—in numbers she had not anticipated.

The presence of the PAD/D Archive within MOMA also has its own logic, and this is the third point. In a sense, the PAD/D Archive serves as an internal reminder that the museum’s foundation rests upon a far larger corpus of cultural productivity, most of which is excluded, but which inevitably surrounds every aesthetic judgment, including the kind of judgments a museum must make all the time about what to collect, and what to avoid or to dispense with (deaccession). In so far as the archive constitutes only a small portion of this “*other*” productivity it might be thought of as a synecdoche, that is to say, a part for a whole and far larger realm of creativity that is efficiently and economically inscribed in reduced form within the larger “book” that is *the museum*. At the same time, as a metaphor with the potential for displacing the grander institutional narrative this shadow archive, both literally and figuratively, must always be kept in check. No better place exists for such aesthetic enforcement than right there within the home that art has built so to speak, or as Derrida might put it, encased within the museum/art world’s “family crypt.” The archive’s presence (dead presence) therefore serves to

guarantee certain acts of valorization (choices regarding what really counts as significant art), something that would not be possible were this archival corpus located outside the museum proper (and therefore capable of being treated as arbitrary and heteronomous in relation to the collection “proper”).

One last thought. So, what if we flip my reading of the PAD/D Archive upside down and view it from the bottom up? Might its very superfluousness serve to challenge normative ideas about cultural valorization? That is a question I have been interested in for some time. What is somewhat astonishing today is the degree to which this shadowy social production is being forced into the light, and not by critical theorists, or political activists, or those of us who seek to “keep the faith.” This missing cultural mass is getting brighter thanks to global communication technologies integral to neoliberal capitalism. Determining whether or not this illumination of what I sometimes refer to as cultural “dark matter” can or will lead to a radical shift in the politics of art, or will instead simply wind up being enclosed by corporate and institutional interests, these are the questions that should most concern us now.

Could you explain what you mean by non-normative practices making authorial originality possible?

If not for the presence/absence of this far more vast body of hidden producers (ie. this dark matter archive, or *corpus*), if not for its highly socialized practices including non-market systems of exchange such as gifting economies, then all individual acts of artistic meaning would appear as nothing more than idiosyncratic. This is the case no matter how unique or autonomous this or that artistic accomplishment appears to be. In this sense the archive of creative dark matter is what makes possible the artistic *Langue* itself in the broadest possible terms. Nevertheless, as a set of preexisting visual-organizational rules linked to the archive (that itself represents a barely filtered excess mass of social-cultural activity), this *Langue* inevitably harbors the ~~possibility~~ always imminent danger of radiating away from any given artwork, or style, or fashion, even to the point of dissipating into the everyday itself, the ultimate space of dark matter production. It is this steady, upward pressure from below that motivates normal artistic, historical, and curatorial practices, and that ~~also~~ even potentially threatens the very house of art. BUT this gravitational pressure also helps explain why so many self-defined vanguard collectives —from the *Constructivists* and *Productivists*, to the *Situationists*, and from *Fluxus* to *Critical Art Ensemble*, and *Las Agencias*— have called for the dissolution of art directly into everyday life. Either consciously or not, they embrace the heterogeneity, repetitions, and redundancies of the shadow archive and its missing

mass, grasping within its very indifference towards being *productive for the market*, (that is to say, for Capital), a radical ontological potential. By the same logic, the restricted economy of art must deny the value of this shadow productivity, ~~but~~ and yet it must simultaneously go on using its hidden presence to authorize “official” artistic value-production. The crisis for the mainstream art world today therefore, is that this shadow creativity is now being literally dragged into the light by globalization, networking, and conditions of flexible labor, all of which seek to make every corner of the world—from the edge of the solar system to our chromosomes to our libido—into an instrument of productivity *for the market*. This brightening of dark matter therefore represents a crisis within the normal processes of artistic valorization including, of course, artistic authorship, still the gold standard of aesthetic value, despite, or perhaps thanks to the conceits of postmodernism. This crisis is visible not only in the way trained artists today often emulate informal, amateur practices, as if they could escape into the everyday so easily, but also in the way theories such as “relational aesthetics” have been so rapidly (and effortlessly) been adopted by the mainstream art industry. Despite the accelerating collision with dark matter social production it seems the art world is still seeking ways to recover meaning and reinvest value in its own, restricted economy. The challenge for normative art practices is how to acknowledge these changes in the status of the archive, dark matter, and so forth, while still maintaining a restricted economy (in Bataille’s sense). The challenge for militant artists is to establish an elective affinity with the mass of redundant producers (dark matter). This I anticipate this will be the frontline of cultural antagonism for some time to come.

Looking at shows such as the Real Estate show in 1979 and Martha Rosler's show (If You Lived Here) at the DIA, and the more recent re-reading of the 1980s at the Grey Art Gallery's Downtown Show in Jan. 2006, it seems that the 1980s could be characterized as leaning towards a strong theorization of subjectivity (particularly in NY; the film *The Fire Within* is one example) geared towards the urban individual as an autonomous right-demanding subject. Can you talk about the position of the subject in these three shows?

Hmmm...I think I grasp what you mean by describing the 1980s as obsessed with the theorizing of subjectivity, but I would strongly caution against dismissing or subsuming the presence of important counter-tendencies during this same period. For instance, the three exhibitions you refer to are markedly dissimilar in some key details that, at the very least, manifest differences about the critical social response of artists during the era of deregulation and privatization. Let’s not forget that *The Real Estate Show* was an illegal squat “gallery” organized without institutional support by a group of artists (splintering off of COLAB) who broke into a boarded-up, city-owned building on Delancey Street. Also recall that this was in 1979, right on the cusp of the triumphant (for some) arrival of neoliberalism in a fiscally devastated New York City. Not

only was the work in this hastily organized action intended to mock real-estate speculators and the warehousing of potentially useful housing by the Koch administration, but as a “direct action” The Real Estate Show was anything but a normal exhibition strategy useful for valorizing individual careers. (I suspect few people know any of the artists who were involved except perhaps Joseph Beuys, who appeared briefly in support of the squatters the day after the NYPD closed down the exhibition.)

By contrast, Martha Rosler’s monumental, three-part exhibition was organized a decade later for a major art world venue and involved many individuals (myself included), as well as groups of artists and non-art activists all collaborating with Rosler. Finally, the *Downtown Show* at New York University took place fifteen years after the Dia show, and two and a half decades after the Delancey Street action, but compared to either of these the NYU exhibition was a strong but traditionally-curated affair invested in a representation of 1980s East Village as the last artistic Bohemia of the Twentieth Century. (Note: much of the work was intelligently selected by Marvin Taylor and Carlo McCormick came from the NYU Fales Library Archive, which is also home to REPOhistory’s documents by the way.)

This movement from squat to cultural institution to the many-faced mega-institution of NYU is certainly a de-fanging of the activist aspects of downtown art into another cultural “type.” But, what I was curious about was the degree to which theoretical discourse informed the more grass-roots activism of COLAB and more specifically PAD/D? What was your sense of these organizations relationships to critical theorists of subjectivity such as Foucault or Antoni Negri and/o the Autonomia Operaia group of which it was a part?

I am not sure I would describe COLAB as a grass roots organization, at least not in my political understanding of that term. COLAB was very much an artists’ group. Its external influence came more from the Punk movement I would say, rather than community-based, activist organizing (of which there was a great deal of in late 1970s New York City). On the other hand, *ABC No Rio*, which developed out of COLAB following the *Real Estate Show* did indeed become a base of operations for all sorts of local activities on the Lower East Side including political and housing activists, as well as neighborhood musicians, graffiti artists, zinesters and so on. In terms of theoretical discourse it is worth noting that the very emergence of “theory” as something artists should be interested in dates in the US from the 1980s. I recall in the early days of St. Marks Bookstore for instance one modestly small bookshelf of “structuralists” held works by Claude Levi Strauss, Barthes, and Althusser. A few years later this “theory” section exploded with

translations of books by Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, Deleuze, Kristeva. But I really have no idea what COLAB people read, if anything (but if you find out please let me know). As far as PAD/D and Group Material goes, some of us were avid readers of the Frankfurt School, and I know that members of both collectives were strongly influenced by British cultural studies. In particular, Raymond Williams's use of Gramsci to reinterpret Marx's concept of base and superstructure was especially influential. Unlike Adorno, Williams did not dismiss the potential political value of popular cultural practices as an expression of political resistance. This seemed to fit well with the work both groups were doing. On a personal note, my interests always leaned towards Benjamin and Brecht (as a student of Hans Haacke this is no surprise). Later I became interested in Derrida and Negri. The PAD/D Reading Group – an official “committee” of the larger organization that only had partial overlap with PAD/D proper-- met at my apartment on East 7th Street throughout the early 1980s. There were about ten of us and in about 1984 we became interested in Negri when a translation of his lectures on Marx's *Grundrisse* entitled *Marx Beyond Marx* were made available in English. (Prior to this the only other material I know by him was including in a special 1980 issue of *Semiotext(e)* focused on the Italian Autonomia movement of the 1970s). It was also about this time that PAD/D produced the “Out of Place” anti-gentrification street poster project on the Lower East Side. Once again, it was Negri's emphasis on resistance and his lack of total pessimism that attracted us. But theory was also sometimes perceived as a detriment to action. Consider the 1986 exhibition “Resistance: Anti-Baudrillard,” that was organized by Group Material. It was an attempt to repudiate the influence of the French theorist at the very moment his notions of simulacra and hyper-reality were being embraced by American appropriationist artists such as Peter Halle.

In Lucy Lippard's text "Archival Activism" she writes that PAD/D strived for a "theory developed out of real experience instead of out of academically & idealized notions." Was there a sense of political detachments then, where talk was performed instead of actions? And do you think PAD/D did somewhat succeed in changing this discourse?

When I arrived in New York City in 1977 to attend The Cooper Union the very idea of explicitly mixing art and politics was considered retrograde (Note: my mentor at school, Hans Haacke, was typically described as a conceptual, not a political artist). The co-founder of Group Material, Tim Rollins perhaps put it best when he quipped that “political art” conjured-up ‘charcoal sketches of Lenin and clenched fists.’ Although I must admit developing an appreciation for amateur charcoal drawings since then, it is correct to say that compared not just to the 1920s and 1930s,

but even to the 1960s and early 1970s, the critical discourse surrounding art in the late 1970s and early 1980s was a very hermetic and formalist one in the United States. The importance of feminism and performance art was not felt in art schools at the time because second-generation abstract expressionists still dominated these institutions for the most part. Meanwhile, archconservative Hilton Kramer at the *New York Times* policed the art world for any signs of radical dissent. At one point Kramer even called for a boycott of *Artforum* by commercial art galleries when the magazine's editors, Max Kozloff and John Coplans, dared to publish essays suggesting that art actually had a relationship to society! So yes, I think by agitating from the margins PAD/D contributed to the change of discourse about art and politics especially in New York City, however, I think even more directly effective at the time was Lucy Lippard's regular art review column in the *Village Voice*. Lippard was fearless when it came to writing what was on her mind, and as a key member of PAD/D that often reflected the political activism of the group at any particular moment. But in addition, we should bear in mind the widespread rejection of Greenbergian formalism and the rise from street to mainstream of Hip Hop culture during the 1980s, as well as of course the East Village Art scene with its recognition of graffiti, handcrafts, outsider painting and sculpture as "serious" (collectible) artworks. But like many self-institutionalized groups formed by artists then or since, PAD/D could not sustain the multiple levels of activity it had imposed on itself. Neither was it prepared for the increasingly conservative political environment of the decade or the diminution of the organized Left. PAD/D ceased to operate around 1988, even though the Archive Committee (Barbara Moore and Mimi Smith) went on to complete the indexing of the archive before turning it over to MOMA.

What was the reminiscence of PAD/D for you as an artist and personal life, and did the collective experience have anything to do with the dissolving of your collective?

Personally, I have found collective work very important to my development as an artist and to my political being in the world. And, I also met my wife of over twenty years, Janet Koenig, through the PAD/D reading group as well. So its fair to say collectivism affected my life on several levels. PAD/D also set the stage for my activity with the group REPOhistory from 1989 to 2000. However, you also ask if personal issues arising from within the group-process lead me to end collective work? No, not really. I now collaborate on occasion with Janet Koenig on projects, most recently in a show curated by Lucy Lippard in Colorado about climate change called "Weather Report": <http://www.bmoca.org/artist.php?id=74> I also recently collaborated with curator Olga Kopenkina and artist Yevgeniy Fiks on a project called "Reading Lenin with

Corporations” <http://www.ps122gallery.org/0108.php> and yet another recent collaboration recently involved Marueen Connor, my colleague at Queens College, as well as several of our grad students, and took the form of a project entitled the *Institute for Wishful Thinking* developed for the *Periferic 8* biennial in Iasi Romania: http://www.periferic.org/index_en.html .)

Nevertheless, its true that tensions within groups (such as PAD/D or REPOhistory) also contributed to their collapse. Which is not surprising if one thinks of such self-organized institutional structures as an opportunity to merge one’s individual interests within a larger identity, but also an over-determined space that concentrates social contradictions from the broader social sphere. Group work focuses such tensions, even as its imaginary seeks to resolve them. To me such overdetermination is both the source of collective energy, and the cause of its instability.

Lyotard talks about how institutions incorporate critique to make the critique its own, and how this critique then in some ways is de-politized. You think this what happen to what Rossler calls the expansion?

What has taken the place of this liberal, administered culture is a fluid and changing landscape filled with risks in which almost every imaginable aspect of existence —from our private fantasies to our social interactions to our DNA —has come under assault by commercial interests ready to enclose and exploit these last remaining zones of life as raw material for the market. The only viable institutional structures left are those of private capital, nevertheless, scattered about this deregulated landscape are the broken shells of vacated public institutions (and if this brings to mind Walter Benjamin’s concept of allegory then all the better). My sense is that some artists today are seeking to occupy these ruins, or perhaps more accurately to wear them like a carapace in the way that certain sea creatures camouflage themselves from predators using discarded materials (see “mockstitutions” below). While Adorno railed against the banalities of administered culture, the current moment marked by what Agamben calls naked life has transformed these failed pieces of public existence into both a modicum of protective mediation, and a reminder of what has been lost for better and for worse.

That's a nice image. The biological metaphor is one that you seem to have incorporated into your own work.

Its my inner-geek speaking after years of watching Z horror movies, reading H.P. Lovecraft, plus a bit of Roger Caillois thrown in for good measure.

One could argue that the boom in critical cultural production in NY had something to do with low rent spaces and the introduction of the Loft Laws in NYC in the late 70s and early 80s. C-M-L has, for reasons both financial and geographic, decided to exist solely on the web. What do you think are the potentials and drawbacks of web-based production?

Booming cultural production will not stop because most artists are being locked-out of urban spaces or because they are suddenly surrounded and subdued by what Saskia Sassen calls the *leisure zones* of global cities. Rather, what we can expect is more and more outsourcing of artistic manufacturing to locations with lower overhead, even as the display and sales apparatus of the art world will remain in city centers for symbolic as well as practical reasons (most especially to provide safe and easy access for collectors).

Right, but in terms of critical cultural production. Do you think this is occurring with those practices as well?

What has been lost, and what may never return in many developed cosmopolitan centers, is the kind of collegial, micro-societies in which artists—and other residents, family, and friends—exchange forms of knowledge and mutual assistance simply not convertible into digital or cellular networks. This activity can be as banal as babysitting a child or a pet or cooking a meal while someone installs an exhibition, to the circulation of materials and techniques for making something, to the production of a newsletter, to the organizing of a group or rally or other action. But from a practical point of view today your proposal for a web-based existence is difficult to argue against and it does have advantages, especially for distributing information on a scale and at a speed not possible in the past. And in many ways, the development of reasonably open-source platforms is in many respects just what PAD/D hoped to accomplish in the pre-internet (and also pre-PC) world of the early 1980s. The danger that online activism and digitized collectivism face might not be due to its relative disconnection from physical intervention and organizing, but from the very same interests now encircling other resources including airwaves, water, genes, blood, and of course oil. The Web will remain an alternative to cheap informational “real estate” for only as long as it escapes being subsumed by capital. The history of battling gentrification, including even cybergentrification, is worth studying. Sadly, it is mostly a history of failure on our part. (How the global financial crisis will affect these enclosures and leisure

zones has yet to be determined, however, just as with the crash of 1989 that blew apart the art market several years later, in 1992, this current contraction will certainly alter cultural production for a very long time. That of course, is an opportunity for real change.)

What did you and your colleagues view as the function of documents in PAD/D?

The function of the PAD/D Archive was first and foremost intended to be pedagogical, in a heuristic sense, as a sort of a DIY resource for other artists that simultaneously presented a model of engaged artistic work. Initially the group's objective was to use the collection as a tool for disseminating ideas about how to engage social and political issues through art. The audience was therefore imagined to be artists, but also non-art activists who we thought of as participants, rather than onlookers or consumers. As I mentioned before, the broader setting for this mission assumed the ongoing existence of a strong Left culture in the United States, quite the opposite of what actually developed. In terms of who the audience for the collection is now it would be best to ask the caretakers at MOMA that question, although I do know of several younger scholars and some artists who have used the PAD/D Archive over the past ten years or so.

I find very often that art becomes divided into these two terms: Political Art and Other Art (or Commercial Art). These terms essentialize complex, contingent, and multivalent activities. I would suggest that there are political readings of art, not political objects or performances, nor political archives for that matter. Objects aren't political, people are.

Of course all art is political since it is produced under particular social and economic conditions. This is so no matter how autonomous a particular work of art may appear to be. But there are also many works of art, and a great many artistic practices that explicitly seek to communicate something political, or in some cases, to actually produce political effects. These represent a *de facto* counter-history to the normative canon of art and its narrative of art for art's sake. And while this other, counter-mythos is fragmented and not entirely inseparable from that of mainstream art, neither is it entirely synonymous with the latter either. This is why I think it is just as serious a mistake to be equivocal about such intentionally militant cultural practices, as well as the counter-discourse they generate, as it is to inelegantly sort art works into such coarse categories as political and a-political, commercial and anti-market. Nevertheless, with that in mind, it is easy to see how some artists become adept at producing a sort of "hot-house" version of "political art." This is a type of work that cannot really exist outside the managed environment

of art galleries, museums, funding agencies. It is a form of agri-culture that becomes popular whenever artistic taste shifts towards socially engaged practices, as they did in the late 1980s and appear to be doing again today judging from the growing interest in Situationism and interventionist art by mainstream cultural institutions and academia.

Today models such as Bernadette Corporation and Reena Spaulings propose fictional characters as the face of a corporate group identity that function in parallel to dominant structures rather than in confrontational opposition to them. How do you see this discourse today, particularly in the context of New York?

There are many mock institutions and ersatz corporate identities which have emerged in recent years including *Reena Spaulings*, *Bernadette Corporation*, but also *Superflex*, *Icelandic Love Corporation*, *The Invisible Inc.*, *Mejor Vida Corp.* *TOROLAB*, or even *The Yes Men*, or *YOMANGO*. In so far as these “mockstitutions” go, they appear to fictively “represent” a corporate brand or franchise. And yes, one would have to say this phenomenon characterizes the collective cultural imagination at the present moment. If we add to this recent tendency other forms of détourned institutional forms invented by artists (and sometimes activists) such as *The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination*, *The Institute of Failure Factory*, *Dept. of Pure and Applied Philosophy (NSK)*, *The Central Office of Technical Culture: C.U.K.T.*, *Factory of Found Clothes*, *The Biotic Baking Brigade*, *Department for Public Appearances*, *Critical Art Ensemble*, *Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army*, *the London Police*, *Institute for Applied Autonomy*, and the *Church of Stop-Shopping*, the overall effect is that of artists who disguise their activity as official-sounding departments, centers, bureaus, offices, and even churches. What all these unreal institutions share in common is a tendency to operate within or as you say in parallel to “real” institutions that “honestly” participate in the market, they also typically reject older forms of oppositional culture in which a separate space or identity is constructed apart from the system (think of PAD/D here by contrast). Such “Tactical Media”™ involves infiltration, rather than overt opposition. According to Geert Lovink and David Garcia TM has no desire to hold space, but act, retreat, retool, and act again. However, to go back to the issue of artists who generate fake corporate or other false institutional identities, there are some important older precedents for this. Just think of the Fluxus-inspired Canadian groups like *Banal Beauty Inc.*, or *N.E. Thing Co.* or *General Idea* (whose name mockingly refers to General Motors artist and curator Luis Jacob insists). And we could also look to Marcel Broodthaers’ imaginary *Musée d'Art Modern* to see other examples of institutional masquerade by artists. Still, the one thing this present era of

simulated self-institutionalization represents to me is a broader social and economic shift away from a culture of administration, and towards that of enterprise culture. I see this as a strong contrast to the sort of cultural institutions developed during the era of the welfare state. As Martha Rosler points out this period of relative democratization in the support of artists also led to an explosion of cultural pluralism so that by the late 1970s,

“the art world had greatly expanded and its institutions become more porous, open to influences from artists and others, including cultural funding intermediaries for political institutions, which brought in the language of social responsibility.”

(Martha Rolser “The: Money, power, contemporary art - Money, Power, and the History of Art,” Art Bulletin, 1997, P 2.)

Rosler adds that this wave of pluralism and its interdisciplinary tendencies, also came to be perceived as a threat to the commercial art world, which perhaps explains in part the return to painting in the 1980s since canvases are a far more marketable type of art than say media installations, performances, and so forth.

Could you develop more about the relationship of the aesthetic of administration and the use of fiction?

For the sake of brevity in this conversational format let’s first recall Benjamin Buchloh’s important observation that the aesthetic language of certain 1960s conceptual artists reflected the visual spectacle of the welfare state bureaucracy. Think of art galleries filled with dossiers, charts, tables, and graphs, or that set of filing cabinets that *Art & Language* displayed at *Documenta 5* in 1972. With the arrival of neoliberal deregulation and privatization in 1980s it seems that a shift in representational practice has taken place, which moves away from the objects and imagery of administered culture (Adorno’s term for post-war art), and towards the actual workings of organizational structures themselves including in some cases entrepreneurial businesses and corporations as well as NGOs. These “mockstitutions” inevitably raise a new set of issues regarding artistic representation. When, for example, *The Yes Men* falsely presented themselves as agents of the WTO, they clearly had to do more than simply render an image of the global institution, they also had to literally function as the institution, at least on some level beyond appearance. Perhaps we could describe this as a shift away from visual representation to one of fictional embodiment? Now it was Plato of course, who objected to all acts of artistic mimicry because these create the appearance of something useful or truthful, but in reality have

no basis in truth (a painting of a house need not keep out the rain, a sketch of a loaf of bread provides no sustenance, etc...). Such deceptions, Plato insists, are dangerous to society (to the citizens of the Republic), because they appeal to an individual's weaknesses, instead of her love of truth or the nation. The question therefore is this: when artists' imitate not things but organizations, as they do today, does this artistic invention have to function as well as the real thing, and if so, what becomes of the line dividing truth from fiction, or a real institution, agency, corporation, from its imitation? (*Critical Art Ensemble* member Steve Kurtz four-year ordeal with the Federal government may be linked in part to this shifting paradigm since the Justice Department probably refused to acknowledge or simply could not perceive this fine line of demarcation.)

Would it be possible that these groups are responding to a new set of issue such as displacement and immigration?

I am not sure, but would be interested to hear your hypothesis about this connection.

We get the impression that a lot of art today, and particularly politically-oriented art, configures itself in advance to incorporation in an archive of some sort, be it the web-based media or physical documentation. Do you see any value in work that seeks to avoid its incorporation as a stable identity? I am thinking here of the activities of Orchard Gallery, which was created with a built-in lifespan and which could be said to both avoid congealing into a gallery "program," and bet on its afterlife in the archive.

Regarding your first question, I don't know of any artists or groups who produced work specifically for the PAD/D Archive, suggesting perhaps some sort of historical divide between then and now? However, once you enter the slipstream of the art world, even at its furthest limits, a process of incorporation is always already under way. Just by approaching it, thinking about it, or trying to avoid it, you are already partaking of its hegemony. Because the art economy is, in spite of all its eccentricities, still ultimately a restricted economy, just like capitalism, it must always be concerned with the recovery of values, maybe not immediately, but at some point "down the road." And value can be mined even from antithetical activity and ideas opposed to the mainstream. To seek out a figure of non-incorporation, even a phantom or spectral space or agency that exists intangibly as discourse, rumor, or memory, is to search for a position of purity that probably cannot exist, and certainly cannot be articulated. To act, to speak out, to educate, to be political, is to risk cooptation and reification, as well as mistakes, and potential failure.

It would seem that two of the lessons to take from institutional critique on the one hand and counterculture on the other is that the former never intended to abolish the institution, but to change its object, while the latter subscribed to an idea of a spatial fix, isolating itself from dominant discourse (which is actually a very small and impoverished segment of culture)—an existence outside of the market. How did you support yourselves?

Through dues and a great deal of in-kind labor PAD/D members supported the group throughout its eight of operation. We also organized several benefits. One of these took place at Club 57 and featured David Wojnarowicz and Julie Hair's band *Three Teens Kill Four*. New to fund-raising I had taken responsibility for that particular event, which was great fun, but a complete financial failure. We did apply for money from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), however with Reagan's new appointees in charge nothing was forthcoming (PAD/D was even singled-out at one point by these neo-cons as the sort of thing the government would no longer fund.) Later, the group finally received some funding from the NEA, a very small amount, but enough that the last few newsletters are thicker and sport four-color covers that reflect this additional money. That said, the group never had much of a budget to work with, no one was paid, no staff hired, and we sublet part of our office to a community radio station to help offset what was already a very modest rent.

You mention that for some members, participation in commercial galleries (commercial art?) was seen as acting in bad faith. Did you have in mind producing an artistic counter-culture independent from the structures of exchange?

As the group stated in its first newsletter:

“PAD [/D] 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...”

To achieve this objective, the group began developing plans for an organization of even larger size and complexity: a national or possibly international network of like-minded activist-artists working in consort with Left political activists (non-artists). This parallel cultural sphere was to be woven out of politically sympathetic exhibition outlets including art galleries at universities or labor union facilities (such as *1199: Health and Human Services Union* here in NYC which has an art gallery on 43rd Street and runs the Bread and Roses Cultural Project: <http://www.bread-and-roses.com/>), as well as community centers and even church halls (recall the influence of Liberation Theology and the Sanctuary Movement that sheltered refugees from Central America on US Left in the early 1980's). I would say that it was this longed-for counter-hegemony that, more than anything else, set PAD/D apart from most other, self-organized, art collectives at the time and perhaps since. The high stakes PAD/D placed on developing this network between artists with activists (and once again, distinct from the art market as well as much of the not-for-profit “alternative” art scene) can be

seen from the diverse topics covered in the group's monthly, public dialogue series known as Second Sundays. A sample list of this program from 1981 includes: The History of Abortion Rights; Civil Liberties and Domestic Surveillance; War Tax Evasion; Unauthorized Art in Public Spaces; Hispanic Culture and Struggle and Art and Ecological Issues. As much as these programs sought to connect artists with progressive activists however, they were also intended to prove to activists the political value of art.

When inviting artists and cultural producers to participate in our project, we are very conscious of the fact that we are requesting them to reconfigure their projects. In order for their projects to be part of our archive, they likely have to use a format different from the one with which they have previously worked (i.e. making a format/description for the web), likewise thinking about a different audience. How did PAD/D deal with this "translation"?

That is an interesting question, but it may apply more to work made on this side of the so-called digital divide than it does to the side that PAD/D operated from?

How did you select which material to include at PAD/D? Were your focus more keeping a record of the end results? the research? How much a viewer could know about these artists and their projects if they did not see the work in "real time/life"?

The material in the PAD/D archive was unfiltered, which is to say, it was self-selected by those groups and individuals who sent material for inclusion and who therefore identified with the concept of the archive itself. In a recent email to me Barbara Moore and Mimi Smith, the two people most responsible for organizing the archive, point out that:

"The archive was set up let the sender make the decision about whether or not their work qualified as socially conscious. If it came in we catalogued it all with the same careful detail no matter what, [except for some prints of cats they received.] We were actually surprised that we didn't get more right wing material or more materials about just plain art that had no social consciousness."

(Quoted from an email to g. sholette on October 30, 2008)

One of our main concerns about presenting this collection of projects as secondhand materials is the loss of their actual functionality. How an archive can avoid its content becoming reified?

Of course any archive is premised on the very possibility that documentation can meaningfully represent what has been produced (I mean this in the broadest sense as the production of work, but also of identity, culture, events), but unless we are nominalists, or believe that it is possible to act in the world without leaving a trace behind, or without expressing, repeating, or disrupting

what Rancier calls the distribution of the visible, then all production is premised on its pre-articulation as potential documentation either concretely —as so many papers, photographs, charts, files, artifacts— or intangibly as conversation, memory, nomenclature, repetitions, and mimesis. From this perspective, both translation and objectification are always taking place regardless of the level of self-consciousness brought to bear on production after the fact so to speak. Maybe Freud’s notion of the *dreamwork* gets at this relationship between content and re-articulation best? So perhaps the issue is less about being afraid of power, than of learning how to handle the inevitable jurisdiction that comes with any act of institutionalization, formal or informal ?

Which 3 art projects would you choose to represent PADD social engagement for the C-M-L archive?

My favorite PAD/D projects were “Death and Taxes” (1981), the “Not for Sale” anti-gentrification projects (1983,1984), and the PAD/D archive itself. (Details on the two public projects are in the PAD/D newsletters that I am in the process of uploading to the site

<http://darkmatterarchives.net>

and they are also described in my text “A Collectography of PAD/D: Political Art Documentation and Distribution: A 1980’s Activist Art and Networking Collective,” see:

http://74.125.95.104/search?q=cache:u5tqvfqslvij:gregorysholette.com/writings/writingpdfs/14_collectography.pdf

Have there been thoughts about digitalizing the archive?

Not to my knowledge, but perhaps this is a question to ask the staff at MOMA?