

## CHAPTER THREE

## DIALOGICAL AESTHETICS

## ORTHOPEDICS AND AESTHETICS

*THE POLITICS OF SHOCK* From Clive Bell's attack on representational "pseudo-art," to Clement Greenberg's fear of kitsch, to Michael Fried's condemnation of the salacious "theatricality" of minimalist sculpture, modern critics have displayed a singular hostility to artworks that solicit the viewer's interaction in a direct or accessible manner. The purpose of avant-garde art, in this view, is to point to the inevitable compromises entailed in any attempt to represent an external reality, or even to invoke that reality as a shared frame of reference with the viewer. If art is to "communicate" anything, as Bersani and Dutoit point out, it is the failure of communication itself (or perhaps the identity of the artist as the one best qualified to diagnose this failure). But what happens after our faith in conventional meaning has been shaken? Does the work of art leave us to wander, skeptical and disoriented, through the modern forest of signs, or can the assault on conventional knowledge catalyze new forms of understanding and agency? We find one answer to this question in the cultural and political ferment surrounding avant-garde art in Germany and Russia following the First World War. The formalist linguistic theories of Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, and Osip Brik exercised a significant influence on poets, filmmakers, and photographers during this period. In Shklovsky's writing we encounter the characteristic call to make art "difficult": to thicken and complicate its formal appearance in order to focus the viewer's attention on the materiality of language itself. This is necessary, Shklovsky believes, because our de-

pendence on existing linguistic conventions encourages a "habitual" form of perception that prevents us from knowing the world in its full complexity.<sup>1</sup>

This view, which parallels that of Greenberg in many ways, emerges in the writings of Vladimir Mayakovsky, Sergei Eisenstein, Bertolt Brecht, Erwin Piscator, Dziga Vertov, and Aleksandr Rodchenko. However, where Greenberg's writing reflects a basic skepticism about the redemptive power of mass culture, the poets, photographers, and filmmakers of the postrevolutionary period share a more optimistic, and nuanced, perspective. They establish a crucial distinction between mass media, such as mainstream cinema, advertising, newspapers, and radio, and forms of popular culture or revolutionary art that are generated by or for the working class. One of the chief effects of mass media is to promulgate ruling-class ideals under the guise of entertainment and disinterested journalism. Stage plays, to use an example from Brecht's writing, encourage the audience to suspend disbelief and passively absorb the (typically conservative) values of the playwright. Revolutionary theater, in contrast, leads viewers to actively question the meanings represented onstage and to extend that critical attitude to the values they encounter in daily political life. Mass media are condemned, not because they signal the bad taste (or limited leisure time) of the working class, but because they suppress working-class consciousness of the operations of social power. In this view the capacity for aesthetic discrimination is not an end in itself but is linked to a more expansive critical capacity focused on the broader social and political world inhabited by the viewer. Moreover, the aesthetic is not defined as a (potentially) universal mode of experience but is differentiated relative to one's social position. The factory worker, for example, has a much greater stake in challenging the naturalness of the bourgeois worldview portrayed in the mass media than the wealthy banker whose contingent reality it represents.

In contrast to the quietism and withdrawal that we encounter among American painters in the postwar period (Rothko, Newman, etc.), avant-garde artists during the 1920s actively engage the viewer, freely employing technologies and modes of presentation associated with mass media and entertainment (e.g., Brecht's use of sporting motifs, stock market prices, and news stories in his plays or Piscator's innovative use of film projection techniques).<sup>2</sup> Key to their work is the experience of "shock," which can be produced by something as simple as seeing a city street from a new perspective (as in Rodchenko's photographs) or as complex as Eisenstein's montage techniques. Where Bell, Greenberg, and Fried describe

a kind of rapt, epiphanic response to the work of art, Brecht speaks of a process of "alienation" in which the spectator is "no longer allowed to submit to an experience uncritically" so that "what is 'natural' must have the force of what is startling."<sup>3</sup> And for Walter Benjamin, as David Frisby notes, objects must be "snatched from the false context of the historical continuum" so that we "confront them with surprise and shock."<sup>4</sup>

Here aesthetic shock or dislocation counteracts the false reality conveyed by dominant cultural forms.<sup>5</sup> Although it operates in a somatic or bodily register, its effects are not purely physical. Rather, the experience of shock becomes the catalytic agent for a "heightened presence of mind," as Benjamin contends.<sup>6</sup> We meet the epistemological challenge posed by aesthetic shock not by abandoning ourselves to the pleasures of ontic dislocation but by renewing, and expanding, our efforts to grasp the complexity of the surrounding world. "Alienation," as Brecht writes, is "necessary to all understanding."<sup>7</sup> Thus the experience of shock (which is necessary to overcome the anesthetic haze of modern life) is followed by a reconsolidation of the subject around a heightened capacity to perceive the hidden operations of political power. It provides a new discursive framework through which the viewer can comprehend the underlying connection between events or conditions (the inverse ratio between corporate layoffs and stock values, for example) that would have previously been less comprehensible. Despite these obvious differences, there are also important similarities between this view and the perspective of Greenberg or Fried. In each case the aesthetic is defined as an immediate (pre-discursive) somatic experience (a shock or epiphany) that is only subsequently "made sense of" in terms of an existing discursive system (the hierarchy of great art for Greenberg or Fried; the political analysis of capitalism for Benjamin). In each case emancipatory aesthetic knowledge is equated with that which is prior to or beyond shared discourse. Moreover, both of these perspectives appeal to an immediacy, a simultaneity of experience (cf. Fried's "presentness"), as opposed to an aesthetic experience defined by duration (although Brecht's work clearly complicates this description). In this sense Greenberg's and Benjamin's descriptions of the viewer's response to avant-garde art mark two ends of a continuum within modernism.<sup>8</sup>

As I have already suggested, the dialogical projects of WochenKlausur, Lacy, and others build on this tradition through their interest in challenging fixed identities and perceptions of difference. At the same time, they conceive of the relationship between the viewer and the work of art quite differently; not simply as an instantaneous, pre-discursive flash of

insight, but as a decentering, a movement outside self (and self-interest) through dialogue extended over time. But a commitment to dialogue, no matter how self-reflexive, signals the reliance of these projects on some common system of meaning within which the various participants can speak, listen, and respond. And this in turn brings us back to the long-established resistance in the modern and postmodern avant-garde to any concept of shared discourse. It is necessary, then, before elaborating my model of a dialogical aesthetic, to explore this resistance more fully. I focus here on the work of Jean-François Lyotard, who provides one of the most thoughtful contemporary expressions of the avant-garde critique of discursive meaning.

*LYOTARD AND THE SUBLIME* For Lyotard, discursive systems of meaning, embodied in the realist tradition in the visual arts, are irrevocably compromised by their association with a conventional reason, which negates or ignores experiences that cannot be articulated through a fixed set of conventions. How can the academic painter, steeped in the static traditions of neoclassicism, ever hope to capture the ephemeral effects of light and space so eloquently revealed in a canvas by Monet? Lyotard will turn to the concept of the sublime in order to elaborate his opposition to realist discourse. In Enlightenment thought the sublime experience is differentiated from the beautiful by virtue of its overwhelming (and potentially life-threatening) power. The sublime exceeds our capacity to measure, categorize, or understand, and, importantly, it reduces us to mute awe (it silences our ability to communicate). For Kant the sublime is specifically associated with the experience of nature (ocean storms, deep canyons, vast waterfalls, etc.). Lyotard links the sublime in the eighteenth century with the gradual erosion of the ideal of an aesthetic "common sense," embodied in a set of rules for addressing a discursively integrated community of listeners.

According to Lyotard the sublime marks the initial expression of a fundamentally new view of the function of the artist and the effect of the artwork on the viewer. Specifically, the sublime replaces a rhetorical aesthetic based on shared discourse with an aesthetic based on somatic shock. The shock of the sublime is not the precursor to a heightened capacity for critical differentiation; rather, it is in and of itself valuable. For Lyotard this experience forces us to recognize the limits of our cognitive knowledge and exercises a chastening effect on the arrogant and totalizing drive of reason.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to Schiller's classic formulation of the aesthetic as a mode of experience that can restore ontological wholeness

and integrity to a humanity torn asunder by the forces of modernity, Lyotard advocates "ontological dislocation" as a therapeutic antidote to a centered and dominative Cartesian identity.<sup>10</sup>

Lyotard offers an important rearticulation of formalist, avant-garde art. The task of advanced art is not simply to reveal the limitations of conventional representational systems (through the poetic torsion of linguistic or visual material, as in futurism, cubism, etc.) but something far more ambitious. It will represent the "unpresentable." It becomes the one site in our culture at which the "excess," that which is beyond discourse or untranslatable into discursive form, is given refuge: an enclave in which the *différend*, to use Lyotard's term, can be preserved and cultivated.<sup>11</sup> Lyotard's use of the concept of the sublime, however, elides the obvious differences between a raging cataract or bottomless chasm and a painting in a museum. The sublime experience produced by an overwhelming force of nature is unproblematically shifted to our experience of a specific fabricated object that challenges our preconceptions about works of art in general. But the most powerful expressions of the sublime in eighteenth-century thought are associated with experiences in which we perceive the possibility of physical danger and come face to face with our own mortality. (Kant and Burke both note that one's proximity to the sublime catalyst must be precisely calibrated; if you step too close to the edge of the Grand Canyon, sublime awe simply becomes terror.) While I may have spent a few tedious afternoons in art galleries over the years, I have yet to encounter a work of art that threatened my very existence.

Lyotard has difficulty providing a persuasive account of the actual effects that "sublime" works of art have on a viewer. Moreover, he overlooks the extent to which we are already prepared to perceive anomalous objects by the institutional frame of the museum or gallery. We often confront anomalous objects in daily life, but they do not necessarily precipitate a full-blown ontological crisis. How, then, do we cross the line from simple confusion to a consciousness-altering encounter with the *différend*? Further, in the history of the avant-garde, the "unpresentable" always, inevitably, becomes the presentable—that which dislocates and rejects tradition becomes tradition in turn. For Lyotard, as for Greenberg, art is caught in an eternal treadmill of (formal) innovation and assimilation. Moreover, to the extent that an appropriative consciousness feeds on difference, the avant-garde work of art ends up supplying this very tendency (embodied in the discourse of art history), with its initial frisson of resistance and its eventual consumption as reified style.

I believe that Lyotard, in his concern to guard against the dominative powers of unbridled reason, unfairly dismisses all forms of discursive interaction. He can conceive of communication only as an "agonistic" contest: "to speak is to fight."<sup>12</sup> For Lyotard speech can function only in one of two ways: as a form of intersubjective conflict and potential negation or as an aesthetically playful (and essentially solitary) domination of language itself, a kind of formalist manipulation of linguistic or literary form for its own sake. The general message implicit in the writings of Lyotard (as well as figures such as Gilles Deleuze) is that at the core of our identity as conscious, volitional subjects with the capacity for discursive interaction is an intensely fearful, malevolent, and defensive force, which can be held in check only by the literally selfless, nondiscursive powers of the body. Whenever we engage in discursive interactions, speech acts, or other forms of communication, this Darth Vaderesque dark side threatens to come to the fore, scheming to maximize its own evil self-interest through the conceptual negation and assimilation of the other.

Art, for Lyotard, is a semiotic zero-sum game: the artist "wins" when the viewer is deprived of as much of the framework of shared discourse as possible and left epistemologically bereft. But Lyotard takes for granted the kind of relationship between viewer and artwork that is implied by both "realism" and "experimentation": a relationship in which the viewer consumes an experience produced a priori by the artist. The only parameter open to question is the precise character of this encounter (easy vs. disruptive). There is no recognition that it might be possible to redefine the relationship between artist and viewer that is implied in both of these approaches and to anchor discourse not in some fixed representational order but in a process of open-ended dialogical interaction that is itself the "work" of art.

I have thus far identified two general modes within the broader tendency toward antidiscursivity in modern art and art theory. (It must be noted that there is significant movement between these two positions, often by the same artist.) The first is a modality of indifference (epitomized by Fried's "authentic" work of art, or by Rothko's or Newman's patient anticipation of the viewer-yet-to-be who is sufficiently evolved to appreciate his work). The second is a modality of engagement and theatricality (as in the work of Brecht, Vertov, or Rodchenko). Whereas Rothko or Newman considers the perceptions of actually existing viewers as largely irrelevant to his work, the theatrical approach produces its own kind of negation. Specifically, this work is prone to what I've described as an "orthopedic" aesthetic, in that it conceives of the viewer

as an inherently flawed subject whose perceptual apparatus requires correction. There are two related assumptions here. First is the belief that the viewer's cognitive or epistemological orientation to the world is somehow defective. This captures a basic truth: we are surrounded by hegemonic cultural systems (in the mass media, journalism, etc.) that are heavily biased by political ideologies. At the same time, this orthopedic orientation preserves the idea that the artist is a superior being, able to penetrate the veils of mystification that otherwise confuse and disorient the hapless modern subject. And second, there is the assumption that the artist is uniquely suited to both recognize this defect and remedy it. It is interesting to note that this rhetoric can cross the division between the theatrical and indifferent modes I outlined above. "It is our function as artists," according to Gottlieb, Rothko, and Newman in 1943, "to make the spectator see the world our way, not his way."<sup>13</sup> And Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, in *Du Cubisme* (1912), acknowledge that the "ultimate end" of art is to "address the masses," but only "in order to move, to dominate, to direct, and not in order to be understood. . . . The artist who abstains from any concessions, who does not explain himself and who tells nothing, builds up an internal strength whose radiance shines all around."<sup>14</sup>

This belief that the viewer suffers from an epistemological lack that will be corrected by the artist brings the orthopedic aesthetic into surprising proximity to the rhetoric of advertising, which promises viewers access to a more prestigious or enlightened social identity if they engage in the requisite act of consumption. Rather than wait for the ideal viewer, these artists seek to actively produce him or her through the experience of consuming the work itself. We are thus left with either contempt for the viewer ("The artist deserves to be belligerent to the majority," as David Smith writes) or an evangelical superiority that conceives of the viewer as a subject-to-be-transformed (for a more recent example, consider Richard Serra's definition of his work as the creation of "behavioral space").<sup>15</sup> In neither case is the artist content to engage with the viewer as he or she actually is, here and now, through a process of collaborative interaction.

I have outlined the gradual consolidation in modern and postmodern art theory of a general consensus that the work of art must question and undermine shared discursive conventions. This model has proved so durable because the dynamic it targets continues to operate in our culture, as we impose reductive stereotypes on people and experiences that

we define as different and implicitly threatening to our own static self-image. Art can indeed challenge our perceptions of difference, but, as I have suggested, this challenge can also entail the paradoxical negation of the viewer as a unique individual. Further, as a framework within which to understand dialogical art practices this avant-garde tradition has some significant liabilities. First, it promulgates a relatively reductive model of discursive interaction based on a neoromantic opposition between mind and body, reason and desire, and somatic and cognitive experience. Second, it restricts the definition of aesthetic experience to moments of immediate, visceral insight. And third, it is based on the essentially solitary interaction between a viewer and a physical object, providing no way to comprehend the creative dimension of communal or collective processes. Is it indeed possible to conceive of an emancipatory model of dialogical interaction? And is there a way to understand this dialogue as a form of aesthetic experience? I will begin to answer this question in the second part of this chapter.

#### DIALOGICAL PRACTICES

*THE SPECIFICITY OF THE AESTHETIC* The concept of aesthetic experience developed by early modern philosophers such as Baumgarten, Kant, and Wolff is defined in terms of a potential communicability that is not necessarily related to works of art per se. For Kant an aesthetic experience is as likely to be triggered by a seashell or a geranium as it is by a Rembrandt. It is Hegel, as Anthony Cascardi points out, who narrows the definition of the aesthetic to "a specific class of objects that are regarded as culturally fashioned objects."<sup>16</sup> But how, precisely, are we to differentiate these objects from objects in nature, or even from other objects fabricated by human beings but not accepted as "art"? The answer provided by modern art theory, as I have suggested, has been to consistently define the aesthetic through its difference from dominant cultural forms, leading us to Lyotard and the aesthetics of the *differend*. But how can indeterminateness, or resistance to fixity and definition, become a "definition" or a determinant condition of art?

From one perspective we can understand the work of art only as the product of a given cultural and historical context (modernism) and a specific discursive system that construct the category of "art" as a repository for values (creative labor, noninstrumentality, nondiscursive forms

of knowledge, etc.) actively suppressed within the dominant culture. There is nothing inherent in a given work of art that allows it to play this role; rather, particular formal arrangements take on meaning only in relationship to specific cultural moments, institutional frames, and preceding artworks. Thus whether I "recognize" a Barnett Newman canvas as a protest against the dehumanizing effects of capitalist labor or as a lovely addition to my penthouse decor has everything to do with the context in which I am viewing it and my own knowledge of art history. At the same time, the work of art is presented as an object that rejects contingency and frustrates the grasp of discursive systems of knowledge through its relentless formal self-transformation. Thus formal meaning, which is in the first instance contingent and context dependent, becomes in the second instance the emblem of an immanent, autonomous (and ahistorical) drive toward flux and differentiation.

The challenge that the aesthetic poses to fixed categorical systems and instrumentalizing modes of thought is important. At the same time, as I have argued above, the tendency to locate this principle of indeterminateness solely in the physical condition or form of the work of art prevents us from grasping an important aspect of performative, collaborative art practice. An alternative approach would require us to locate the moment of indeterminateness, of open-ended and liberatory possibility, not in the perpetually changing form of the artwork qua object, but in the very process of communication that the artwork catalyzes. This requires two important shifts. First, we need a more nuanced account of communicative experience: one capable of differentiating between an abstract, objectifying mode of discourse that is insensitive to the specific identities of speaking subjects (the kind targeted by figures such as Lyotard) and a dialogical exchange based on reciprocal openness. This distinction, between what Jürgen Habermas terms an "instrumental" and a "communicative" rationality, is typically collapsed in modern and post-modern art theory. The second important shift requires that we understand the work of art as a process of communicative exchange rather than a physical object. In this description visual art approaches the condition of theater. But while the works of WochenKlausur, Lacy, and others are performative to the extent that they see the identity of the artist and the participant as produced through situational encounters, they are not subsumable into the traditions of theater, to the extent that these depend on the concept of the "performer" as the expressive locus of the work. I will try to make this distinction somewhat clearer through some specific examples.

#### STEPHEN WILLATS AND THE AUDIENCE AS RATIONALE

A pre-requisite for an art work that manifests a counter-consciousness is that the separation which existed between the artist and the audience is closed, that they become mutually engaged, to the point where the audience become the rationale in both the making and reception of the work.

Stephen Willats, *Society through Art*

London-based Stephen Willats is one of several influential artists in Europe and the United States who used the movement away from the object initiated by conceptualism to develop a collaborative, dialogical art practice in the 1960s and 1970s. Over the past three decades Willats has produced a number of extended projects with the residents of public housing estates or tower blocks in England, Germany, Finland, and elsewhere in Europe. In many cases he returns to these projects and sites over a period of several years. Willats is particularly concerned with the social and somatic experience of living in public housing (especially in isolated high-rise buildings) and with identifying and facilitating modes of resistance and critical consciousness among the residents of these estates. He seeks to challenge what he calls the "New Reality" promulgated by the bureaucratic planning apparatus that developed in Britain during the postwar period.<sup>17</sup> One of Willats's main goals is to acknowledge and honor a process of autonomous decision making and self-reflection among communities that are typically treated by the state and private sector as a kind of inert raw material to be variously processed and regulated, both spatially, in the architecture of state-subsidized housing, and ideologically, through the mechanisms of consumer society. As he writes, "My practice is about representing the potential self-organizing richness of people within a reductive culture of objects and possessions. In a society which reduces people I'm working to celebrate their richness and complexity. I see this as a kind of cultural struggle."<sup>18</sup> In his projects Willats shifts the focus of art from the phenomenological experience of the creator fabricating an exemplary physical object to the phenomenological experience of his co-participants in the spaces and routines of their daily lives.

Willats has postulated a concept of "socially interactive" culture that redefines art in terms of the discursive relationship that it establishes with the viewer. In this context conventional art is understood as a process of

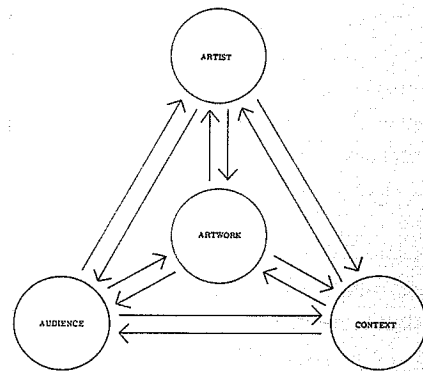


FIGURE 16. Stephen Willats, "A Socially Interactive Model of Art Practice" (c. 1970). Courtesy of the artist.

object production that occurs in isolation from the actual viewer and under the guidance of presuppositions about a potential viewer that are never fully tested. (Cf. Jack Burnham's description of Hans Haacke's "real-time" relationship to the viewer.) There is little or no way for the viewer's responses to the work in the gallery to be communicated to the artist so that he or she might modify future works (except through the professionalized surrogate of art criticism). Willats argues for a form of aesthetic exchange in which the artist's own presuppositions are potentially challenged by the viewer's response through a process of direct collaboration and feedback (figs. 16 and 17). Both Willats and his collaborators are able to transform their consciousness of the world through a dialogical encounter that is mediated by the production of image/text pieces, often in the form of signboards located in the housing estate or tower blocks themselves.

A common strategy in Willats's collaborative projects involves the identification of specific sites at which his co-participants are able to exercise some autonomy from, or resistance to, the bleak and repressive environments of the housing estate. This concern with spatial politics and

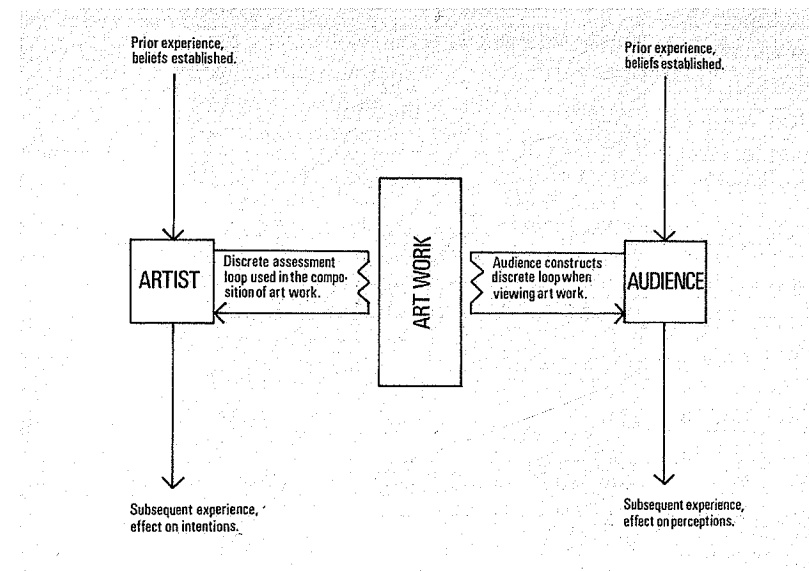


FIGURE 17. Stephen Willats, "Conventional Relationship of an Artwork between Artist and Audience" (c. 1970). Courtesy of the artist.

identity is evident in a number of works he produced in the 1980s, including *Pat Purdy and the Glue Sniffers' Camp* (1981–82), which examined the "reterritorialization" of a wasteland near the Avondale estate in West London; *The Kids Are in the Streets* (1981–82), about a skateboard park located near a municipal housing estate outside Brixton; and *Are You Good Enough for the Cha Cha Cha?* (1982), created with the members of a punk music club in London.<sup>19</sup> Willats uses the process of collaborative interaction with the estate residents to help them distance themselves from immersion in the life-world of the estate and to reflect back critically on the network of visible and invisible forces that pattern that world. The aesthetic distance, or "defamiliarization," typically achieved in a modernist painting through the manipulation of representational conventions is created here through collaborative production itself. Key to this is what Willats calls the question: an initial interrogative statement developed with a given group of participants that is used to provide a framework for critical reflection: for example (in *The People of Charville Lane*), "What do you think are the everyday pressures on family life created by moving into a house on this estate?" By trying to describe their life experience to Willats (and to themselves and other residents),





FIGURE 18. Stephen Willats, *From One Generation to Another* (1992–93), Märkisches Viertel, Berlin, photographic prints, acrylic paint, and Letraset text on paper and card, 126 × 76.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

by bringing it into discursive form via statements, images, and so on, the residents establish a distance from this experience and situate it within a parallel world in which reflexive examination is more easily facilitated (fig. 18).<sup>20</sup>

Hans Herbert Kögler's *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault* (1999) provides a useful theoretical resource for understanding Willats's approach. Kögler explores the methodological impasse that exists between the work of Michel Foucault, which privileges the philosopher/theorist as the only agent capable of an "undistorted insight" into the (seemingly implacable) effects of power on social interaction, and the tradition of critical hermeneutics (repre-

sented by Gadamer and, later, Habermas), which tends to underestimate the extent to which these same exchanges are constrained by forms of social domination. It is possible to reconcile these two analyses, according to Kögler, if we replace the conventional "interpreter/outsider" and "agent/insider" relationship in the social sciences with a dialogical rapprochement between the theorist and the situated agent. These exchanges would combine the theorist's command of "methodological and conceptual tools" with the subject's own complex self-understanding to challenge both the "hidden symbolic assumptions" that define the subject's context and the limitations of abstract theorization. The result would be a "dialogical cross-reconstruction" or "reciprocal elucidation" of a given social context. "While the theorist helps the agent to get a clearer understanding of *how* power works," according to Kögler, "the agent helps the theorist to recognize which structural constraints count *as* power."<sup>21</sup>

Kögler's analysis tends to understate the extent to which the theorist is also a socially and politically situated agent, but it demonstrates the importance of a process of triangulation among multiple perspectives in recovering the "truth" of power relationships in a given context. Thus, while the projects of Willats still run the risk of promulgating an orthopedic relationship to the participants (who need the artist/theorist to reveal the hidden symbolic assumptions of their life-world), this perception is seen less as a gift (made possible by the superior critical faculties of the artist) than as the product of a collaboratively generated insight. In dialogical practice the artist, whose perceptions are informed by his or her own training, past projects, and lived experience, comes into a given site or community characterized by its own unique constellation of social and economic forces, personalities, and traditions. In the exchange that follows, both the artist and his or her collaborators will have their existing perceptions challenged; the artist may well recognize relationships or connections that the community members have become inured to, while the collaborators will also challenge the artist's preconceptions about the community itself and about his or her own function as an artist. What emerges is a new set of insights, generated at the intersection of both perspectives and catalyzed through the collaborative production of a given project.

Another important component of Willats's approach concerns the significance that estate residents assign to physical objects in their immediate environment. Again, as with the spatial practices I have discussed, he seeks to identify points of resistance in the relationships that residents

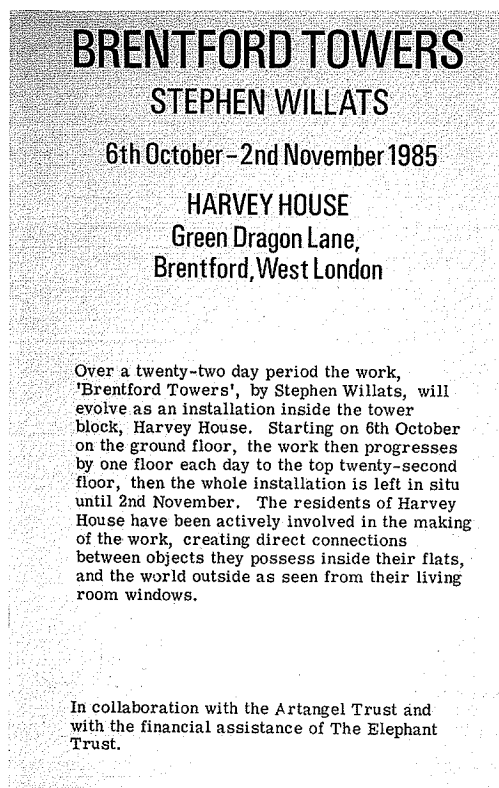


FIGURE 19. Stephen Willats, *Brentford Towers*, announcement card (1985). Courtesy of the artist.

establish with these objects. Willats is interested in the ways in which people “curate” their living spaces, assigning value to objects in opposition to a market system that links the consumption of specific consumer goods to a priori models of identity (i.e., owning a sports car symbolizes superior virility). Thus in *Brentford Towers* (1985) Willats worked with residents to map the interiors of their own apartments, identifying objects that held a personal significance, which they then related to scenes in the outside world that they regularly viewed through their windows. These works typically involve a montage technique that combines portraits of the individual (posed in collaboration with Willats), statements taken from interviews (“I don’t want to be one of the faceless masses”), and images that contrast the private interiors, in which the residents have

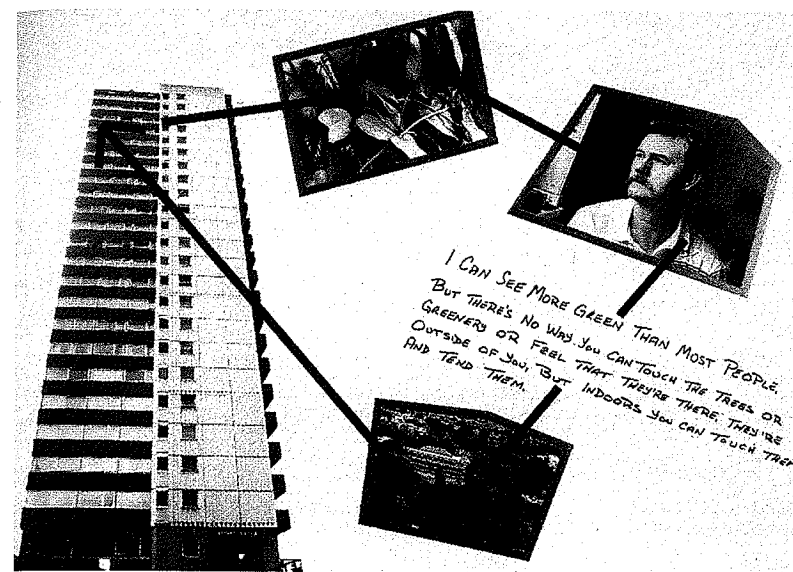


FIGURE 20. Stephen Willats, *Brentford Towers* (1986), display panel, photographic prints, acrylic paint, ink on card, 59 × 84 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

attempted in various ways to mark out the space as a reflection of their own identities, and the concrete monotony of the surrounding environment (figs. 19 and 20).<sup>22</sup> In *Private Icons* (1983), Willats collaborated with a young man who created a refuge in his apartment through the collection and creative transformation of religious icons.<sup>23</sup> And in *Pat Purdy and the Glue Sniffers' Camp* he documented abandoned objects that had been put to use at wasteland camps near a housing estate. Like the “question” that helps to catalyze self-reflection in Willats’s other projects, the temporary abstraction of these objects from the gestalt of their surrounding spatial context triggers interactions among residents and with Willats, facilitating a critical consciousness of the function they perform within a broader ecology of material and ideological signs.

*WOCHENKLAUSUR AND CONCRETE INTERVENTION* Dialogical exchange plays an even more central role in the works of the Austrian group Wochen-Klausur, part of a younger generation of practitioners concerned with communicative interaction in nonart settings. As their name suggests (roughly translated, it means “weeks of closure” as well as seclusion), their projects are defined in terms of a set time frame during which they first describe



a specific problem and then bring together the resources necessary to facilitate its resolution through a concentrated series of actions. Founding member Wolfgang Zinggl defines their practice in terms of what he calls “concrete interventions” in the field of social policy. As opposed to earlier forms of activist art, which often sought to “change everything but wound up changing nothing,” in Zinggl’s words, WochenKlausur’s practice is to identify specific problems, resolvable through the achievement of clearly defined and concrete goals.<sup>24</sup>

WochenKlausur’s projects can be generally divided between what might be termed “collaborative” and “advocacy-based” works. Collaborative projects involve the generation of new institutional and spatial arrangements in consultation with specific groups, communities, and individuals. Examples would include their *Intervention in Community Development* of 1997, in which WochenKlausur staged a series of conversations with the residents of Ottensheim, a small town outside Linz, concerning their visions for their community. The result was the formation of three interest groups (IGs); one was devoted to the needs of the town’s older residents, one to the town’s youth, and one to the general development of the town’s historic center. The Youth IG constructed a skateboard ramp with donations from local firms, along with a youth center. The Town Center IG developed a proposal to stage a weekly market, and the Elder IG established regular meetings between students at the local Polytechnic and older residents to compile oral histories and encourage intergenerational relationships. The result of all of these activities was the creation of a set of proposals to the Ottensheim town council for expanding future community involvement in democratic decision-making processes in the town. A “Pro-Ottensheim” political party emerged out of this project and is now the third-largest party on the town council.

WochenKlausur’s *Intervention in a School* (1995–96) involved a similar process of consultation and action organized around the collective rethinking of the spaces of everyday life. Here WochenKlausur worked with the students in a Viennese secondary school, asking them to propose their own vision for the redesign of their classrooms, desks, chairs, and so on. “Pupils have no lobby,” as WochenKlausur notes. “They also have almost no influence on the design of the classroom space in which they spend many years of their lives.”<sup>25</sup> Through extensive meetings with the school’s twelve-year-old students, WochenKlausur developed a new seating arrangement for the class that replaced the existing seats, ori-

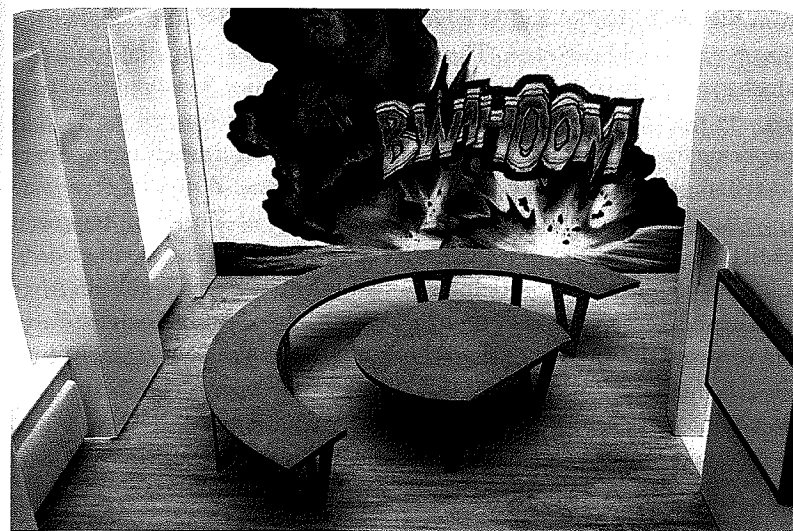


FIGURE 21. WochenKlausur, *Intervention in a School*, University of Applied Art, Vienna, Austria (November 1995 through January 1996). Courtesy of WochenKlausur.

ented to the front of the room, with a series of rounded desks grouped in concentric rings around the blackboard (fig. 21). They also created a cushioned “sitting corner” for the students and improved the lighting system in the room. Due to the resistance of the educational bureaucracy to this kind of individualized reconstruction of classroom space, WochenKlausur was forced to locate funding and sponsorship outside the school.

The second area of WochenKlausur’s practice involves working through existing political and administrative systems to change conditions for a given group (typically a group that occupies a disempowered position relative to dominant cultural or political institutions). These projects tend to be less collaborative in terms of the perceived beneficiaries and instead are developed on behalf of this constituency through a network of official representatives. In *Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women* (which I discuss in the introduction), dialogue about pragmatic responses to the drug problem in Zurich among policy makers and others was constrained by the fear that their statements would be taken out of context and used against them politically. It was necessary for WochenKlausur to create a discursive space that was to some extent insulated

from this rhetorical effect, in which key participants in the debate over drug policy could converse. The organization of the "boat colloquies," which eventually included the secretaries of the major Swiss political parties, the police commissioner, four of the eight city councilors, several corporate managers, and the chief editors of the city's major newspapers as well as sex workers and activists, involved some degree of creativity as well. Thus WochenKlausur asked the mayor of Zurich if he would participate, telling him that the leader of the Socialist Party had already volunteered but would participate only if the mayor was involved. After securing his agreement, they then met with the head of the Socialist Party and reversed the story. The final result was temporary government support, through the Zurich Social Department, for a *pension* housing fifteen women (it was eventually given permanent funding).

WochenKlausur's *Intervention in a Deportation Detention Facility* (1996) focused on conditions at the Salzburg Police Detention Center, in which immigrants awaiting deportation (but not legally under arrest) were warehoused. Because of conditions there, as WochenKlausur notes, the center was "worse than any prison." Inmates were routinely denied access to information about their rights as detainees; living conditions in terms of food, shower access, and laundry were primitive; and inmates weren't allowed televisions, radios, or even books, even though they were kept in the facility for up to six months. As they did in Zurich, WochenKlausur created a working group of representatives from the media, local churches, the Interior Ministry, and various relief organizations to develop a professional consensus around possible changes in the detention facilities. This consensus was then used to overcome the facility director's initial resistance to the idea of allowing the detainees access to social services. With funding from the Protestant Refugee Service, WochenKlausur was able to assign caseworkers to each refugee and to provide them with better living conditions and access to legal services. They created dayrooms for detainee recreation, collecting "games, books, newspapers, fitness equipment, a table soccer unit, a television and radios," as well as a card telephone with subsidized access.<sup>26</sup>

Both the collaborative and the advocacy-based projects of WochenKlausur involve an intensive process of dialogue and discussion to determine the appropriate form for a given intervention. There is potentially some problem with advocacy projects that benefit disempowered populations (detainees, prostitutes, etc.) even as they take advantage of that disempowered status to speak for them through a phalanx of non-governmental organization (NGO) experts and government representa-

tives (a problem I will return to in the following chapter). However, WochenKlausur appears to be cognizant of this problem and fairly realistic about the strategic necessity of these sorts of relationships. Wolfgang Zinggl contrasts their pragmatic, locally responsive approach to the more grandiose (but less practical) rhetoric of figures such as Joseph Beuys, who sought nothing less than the long-yearned-for sublation of art and life. This strategic sensibility extends to their attitude toward the prestige value of art itself: "The context of art offers advantages when action involves circumventing social and bureaucratic hierarchies and quickly mobilizing people in positions of political, administrative or media responsibility to accomplish concrete measures. An invitation from an art institution provides WochenKlausur with an infrastructural framework and cultural capital, while the exhibition space serves as a studio from which the intervention is conducted." At the same time, the realism that allows WochenKlausur to so effectively respond to specific problems can also tend to foreclose a political vision that could link these concrete solutions to a broader emancipatory movement among those who have been strategically disempowered. This absence is all the more striking given the tradition of autonomous (*Autonomen*) political organizing in Austria and Germany (the Hafenstrasse occupation in Hamburg, for example).<sup>27</sup> Conversely, one might argue that the vision of WochenKlausur's interventions lies in the working paradigm or methodology that they have evolved, which can potentially be replicated by other groups working in other contexts.

In response to those who would equate their practice with social work or activism, Zinggl is insistent that it be defined in terms of art. "Localized between social work and politics, between media work and management," as Zinggl writes, "interventions are nonetheless based on ideas from the discourse of art." These ideas would include, first, the capacity to think critically and creatively across disciplinary boundaries. "Art lets us think in uncommon ways," according to one of WochenKlausur's statements, "outside of the narrow thinking of the culture of specialization and outside of the hierarchies we are pressed into when we are employed in an institution, a social organization, or a political party." A second and related characteristic, as I have already suggested, is the facilitation of unique forms of discursive interaction (as in the Zurich boat trips). "This type of art," Zinggl writes, "does not need the [artist as] prophet or priest. . . . Instead, it arises from intersubjective communication and reflection on the possibilities of taking part in a changing world."<sup>28</sup>

*JAY KOH AND THE ART OF LISTENING* I want to discuss one additional set of dialogical projects, by the Singapore-born, Cologne-based, artist Jay Koh. Koh's early activist work in Germany was focused on health care and scientific research. He helped establish one of the first public interest groups in Cologne to protest against the dangers of genetic engineering (Cologne is a center for genetic research) and worked on the development of a patient information system that allowed health service users to monitor and evaluate the performance of doctors. In 1992 Koh founded an organizational entity called arting that serves as the basis for a range of different activities: symposia, artist and critic exchanges especially focused on Asia, exhibitions, demonstrations, and so on. "The idea," as Koh wrote, "was to create a platform where I, together with my colleagues, could use the medium of contemporary art to intervene in various social processes and structures."<sup>29</sup> In 1997 Koh founded a smaller group, the International Foundation for Intermedia Arts (IFIMA), which mobilizes ad hoc affiliations of artists, activists, and writers in Germany and Asia for the creation of specific projects.<sup>30</sup> *Genopoly* (1990) was one of the first "intermedia" projects Koh developed with arting. It involved a series of performances, lectures, and exhibits designed to raise public consciousness about the dangers of genetic research (especially of experiments under way in Cologne to implant human genes in animal "receptors").

*Genopoly* would set the pattern for a number of subsequent arting projects. It was based on the creation of collaborative alliances between various activist and arts organizations in Cologne and elsewhere (from the Bürger Beobachten Petunien to the South and Meso-American Indian Rights Center). This crucial networking component was combined with the interdisciplinary focus of the project, which featured lectures, performances, exhibited artworks, publications, a Web site, and so on. Underlying many of arting's projects is the recognition that complex social and political issues, like those raised by genetic research, cannot be adequately addressed simply by fabricating physical objects (sculptures, paintings, and so on) but require polyvalent responses that operate on multiple levels of public interaction. Other projects have included *Auszeit der Demokratie*, or "Time-Out in Democracy" (1993), which featured exhibits, public works and actions, and a lecture series developed in response to the drastic increase in killings and attacks on *Ausländer*, or "foreigners," in Germany by fascist groups following reunification. Koh brought together dozens of artists, who developed performances, collages, installations, and other works reflecting critically on German xenophobia.<sup>31</sup>

For centuries the West has been engaged in a complex set of exchanges in which the countries of Asia are used both as cultural or stylistic resources (*Japonisme* and *Chinoiserie* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) and as testing sites for the most advanced techniques for the regulation of labor (from the East India Company to Hewlett Packard).<sup>32</sup> Koh's awareness of this conflicted history has contributed to his skepticism about the current fascination with Asian cultural exchange in the U.S. and European art worlds. For Koh this interest, although often well intended, is highly problematic, as it carries with it certain neocolonial mechanisms of both exoticization and homogenization. Moreover, it is often characterized by an inadvertently patronizing attitude on the part of Western organizers, due to the discrepancy in economic resources available to arts organizations in the West versus those in Asia, and Southeast Asia in particular. Koh draws a parallel between the role of powerful institutions like the International Monetary Fund in representing Western economic interests in Asia (under the guise of a benevolent globalism) and the role of the powerful curatorial/critical system of the Western art world in representing European and American cultural interests. He has written critically about what he calls "the scale," the "universal and ideal" (and implicitly Western) standard employed by curators, artists, and critics from the United States and Europe that treats non-Western art as little more than a "copy" or reflection of tendencies and attributes that are seen as originally or more fully developed in Western cultural practices.<sup>33</sup>

Koh is clearly cognizant of the potential dangers of negation and universality implicit in discursive interaction. At the same time, rather than reject a communicative aesthetic out of hand, he attempts to produce modes of interaction and exchange that can minimize these dangers. One of his central concerns has been the facilitation of an ongoing dialogue among Asian artists, historians, and critics. "Cultural imperialism does not depend on arms or technological superiority but consists of attacks from the intellectual side and the constant reinforcement of prejudices," Koh has written. "A lot of Asian people reinforce this way of thinking. They are educated in the west, blindly believing in its total superiority while those at home follow the same blind faith."<sup>34</sup> Koh's ongoing *Network Project* involves a series of initiatives developed with artists and arts groups in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Tibet. These include collaborative sponsored exhibitions, exchanges of artists and writers between, for example, Germany and Myanmar or Thailand, and the organization of conferences devoted to the definition of an independent Asian arts practice. Koh has traveled extensively, building a

network of connections among Asian artists in an effort to provide an institutional and discursive alternative to the growing interest (economic as well as intellectual) in Asian art and culture among European and American NGOs, state agencies, critics, and dealers. Koh has been particularly concerned to support the emergence of an independent critical apparatus in Southeast Asia that can offer an alternative to the ways in which art is valued and evaluated in the West. To this end he developed *The Other Critic* (1997–99), an exchange program with critics and artists from Bangkok, Myanmar, and Dhaka University in Bangladesh. His *Collaboration, Networking and Resource-Sharing* project in Myanmar (2002) has led to the formation of a new artists' community, the Aye-yarwady Art Assembly, and the creation of an independent art center in Myanmar.

Many of the cultural exchanges orchestrated by or on behalf of Western institutions ignore the specificity and complexity of local art and cultural production, as well as the political implications of the power differentials between developed and strategically underdeveloped countries, through an appeal to art as a "universal language" that allows people from radically different cultures and backgrounds (e.g., the United States and Myanmar or Indonesia) to identify some common ground for interaction. For Koh these exchanges have to begin with a frank acknowledgment of existing differences. They must also involve a sensitivity on the part of practitioners and organizers associated with dominant, Western fine arts institutions to the ways in which exchange is constrained and structured by the specific cultural and political context of a given country, region, or site and by the broader political and economic interrelationships between their respective countries.

The problem of this aesthetic universality was usefully illustrated in the controversy that accompanied a highly publicized exhibition, "Tomorrow Is Another Day," by the U.S.-based artist Rirkrit Tiravanija at Cologne's Kölnischer Kunstverein in the winter of 1996–97. Tiravanija is widely viewed as an iconoclastic outsider who challenges not only art world conventions but also fixed notions of identity. (He was born in Buenos Aires and lived in Bangkok and Canada before relocating to the United States.) His installations transgress divisions between the public and the private through the creation of "parallel spaces" in which he assembles temporary cafés, dining rooms, and playhouses in galleries and museums. It should be noted, however, that Tiravanija is also a highly successful and sought-after artist who works and teaches in New York, the very epicenter of Western cultural privilege. Tiravanija has been in-

vited to re-create his "parallel spaces" in galleries and museums throughout Europe and the United States, where they are celebrated as embodiments of art's power to transcend institutional and cultural boundaries and to create a utopian space of free and open exchange (of food, conversation, etc.).

In the winter of 1996, as Tiravanija was reconstructing his New York apartment in the Kölnischer Kunstverein as an "open space" for cooking, eating, and "communal celebration," the Cologne police were in the process of breaking up and driving out a settlement of homeless people near the gallery, under pressure from a local business group called City Marketing that was concerned about the threat the homeless would pose to tourism and gentrification in the area.<sup>35</sup> While Cologne's liberal press lauded the show as a model of "intercultural exchange," a number of local artists and activists found the juxtaposition of Tiravanija's magnanimous spatial gesture (albeit one in which admission was carefully monitored by a stern Hausmeister) and the brutality of (business-motivated) police attacks on the homeless deeply problematic.

Cologne-based art activist Stefan Roemer produced a video critique of the exhibition (also titled *Tomorrow Is Another Day*) that included the following dialogue: "They act as if they are being so generous in making this room available when they are really doing nothing at all. It is a meaningless statement. At the same time they are making this grand gesture fifty homeless people are being ordered to clear out their camp and go. . . . [I]t fits perfectly with the rhetoric of globalism, with its empty platitudes and its commitment to image over real change."<sup>36</sup> Koh's protest took the form of the following message (in Thai), written on the front door of the gallery: "N Sawasdee Khrap, Nong Chail ["Greetings, younger brother," in Thai]. Your Process art sounds good, but what about the 'process' in your [Thai] society? The women and poverty?"<sup>37</sup> While Tiravanija cannot be blamed for the attacks on the homeless community near the gallery (or for labor conditions in Thailand), his project suggests the challenges faced by artists who claim a dedication to dialogue but ignore the (political, social, and cultural) context in which that dialogue is situated.

For Koh the work of art is not simply a physical object but a specific social process: the catalyzation of dialogue, the exchange of ideas, and the collective generation of new aesthetic paradigms. The concept of discursive exchange as an antidote to the violence of economic exchange is elaborated in the *Exchanging Thought* (1995–96) project that Koh developed in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in collaboration with members of



FIGURE 22. Jay Koh, *E.T. (Exchanging Thought)*, at Pak Tuk Kong Market (November 1995–January 1996), Chiang Mai Social Installation Art and Culture Festival, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Courtesy of Jay Koh.

the group Bon Fai. *Exchanging Thought* was held in several different public markets in Chiang Mai over a two-month period and involved bringing objects and works produced by artists from seventeen countries, including Germany, Finland, Iran, Brazil, Turkey, and Eritrea, among others, to the market and offering to exchange them for other objects brought for trade by local residents (fig. 22). According to the *Exchanging Thought* catalog, these transactions “cross cultural and professional differences on the basis of respect and equality in a process where the spectator becomes a participant.” Objects play a central role here as both symbols for and embodiments of a kind of equitable material dialogue intended to challenge the instrumentalizing logic of the art market.<sup>38</sup>

To understand Koh’s work it is necessary to shift from a concept of art based on self-expression to one based on the ethics of communicative exchange. The act of establishing networks among Asian artists, writers, and activists across national boundaries is an integral part of his artistic practice, constituting a kind of “aesthetics of listening.” The Italian philosopher Gemma Corradi Fiumara, in her book *The Other Side of Language*, notes the etymological origins of the Greek term *logos* in *legein*: to lie with, to gather in, or to receive. She juxtaposes this with

what she calls “the assertive tradition of saying” that has dominated Western philosophy and art. “We have little familiarity with what it means to listen,” Fiumara writes, because “we are . . . imbued with a logocentric culture in which the bearers of the word are predominately involved in speaking, molding, informing.”<sup>39</sup> It was this instrumentalizing aspect of language that modern art attempted to circumvent through its withdrawal into opacity and inscrutability. But Fiumara refuses to surrender the concept of dialogue entirely; instead, she argues that we must begin to acknowledge the long-suppressed role of listening as a creative practice.

For Koh an art practice that privileges dialogue and communication cannot be based on the serial imposition of a fixed formal or spatial motif (as in Tiravanija’s “cafes” and “lounges”). Rather, it must begin with an attempt to understand as thoroughly as possible the specific conditions and nuances of a given site. Only then can one devise the most effective and responsive formal manifestation, gesture, or event. For Tiravanija this would have involved taking the time to learn what was happening in the neighborhood around the gallery in which his work was installed or considering the symbolism of stationing a guard at the entrance of an exhibit based on ideals of openness and accessibility. Well before the enunciative act of art making, the manipulation and occupation of space and material, there must be a period of openness, of non-action, of learning and of listening. For Koh it is even more important that Western artists and institutions, for whom the “assertive tradition of saying” comes so naturally, also learn to begin by listening.

#### AESTHETICS AND ALTERITY

*A DIALOGICAL AESTHETIC* Willats, WochenKlausur, and Koh all define their artistic practice through the facilitation of dialogue and exchange. But what kind of dialogue is this, and what exactly makes it aesthetic? Kant contends that in aesthetic experience our “cognitive powers are in free play.”<sup>40</sup> When we are no longer required to perform the onerous labor of testing each perception against an existing conceptual repertoire, we experience a unique liberatory pleasure. Further, in the very act of enjoying the unconstrained and harmonious operation of our mental faculties we recognize their implicit universality; we realize that everyone must experience the world through the same basic cognitive process. Here is the foundation of aesthetic “common sense”: literally a sense of the



commonness of cognition itself. This knowledge is produced at two sites: the viewer and the object. As viewers we achieve universality by purging ourselves of the (prototypically bourgeois) self-interest that is characteristic of our "normal" cognitive relationship to things like used cars, ravioli, and potential employers (i.e., what can this object/person do for me? Is it a threat? Can I eat it? Can I sell it?). To perceive objects aesthetically we must rise above our specific identities as subjects (our desires or "interests") and see things from a point of view that is universal. But what remains of the subject once self-interest is subtracted or suppressed? The aesthetic subject functions for Kant as a kind of transcendent cipher: the lineaments of a subject, awaiting the specific content of a singular human being.

A similar fate awaits the object of aesthetic contemplation. Here we experience aesthetic perception by abstracting from the specific conditions of the object qua object to the object as representation, or *Darstellung*. This image acts as a kind of catalyst, setting in motion our cognitive operations without the practical considerations that are forced upon us by objects in the real world. It is our reflective "apperception" of these operations that allows us to intuit the existence of a ground for communication (and potential unity) with other human beings. Kant's account of the aesthetic contains a radical promise: the calculating and defensive individual has the capacity to become more open and receptive, to view the world not as a resource to be exploited but as an opportunity for experimentation and self-transformation. But this promise can be fulfilled only by robbing the object of aesthetic contemplation of its specificity and its ability to speak to us in turn. How might the position of the viewer and the object be handled differently in the context of a dialogical model of aesthetic experience? Is it possible to practice this sort of attitude in our relationships with people rather than representations?

*HABERMAS AND DISCOURSE ETHICS* There are two interrelated areas in which the definition of a dialogical aesthetic must be pursued: an investigation of speech acts and dialogue and an investigation of intersubjective ethics and identity formation. First it is necessary to shift from thinking about discourse primarily in terms of *langue*, as a fixed, hierarchical system of a priori meaning, to an understanding of discourse as *parole* and dialogue. The bracketing of the speech act by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure as an unsuitable area for the elaboration of "scientific" or theoretical knowledge led to a tendency on the part of those structuralist and poststructuralist thinkers who wrote under his influence

(including figures such as Lyotard) to hypostatize *langue* as the essence of discourse at the expense of any detailed consideration of actual human dialogue.<sup>41</sup> A related set of questions circulates around the ways in which identity is formed and transformed through our encounters with other subjects.

Given these concerns, I consider the writing of the German theorist Jürgen Habermas to be an important resource for the development of a dialogical aesthetic.<sup>42</sup> Habermas's work on the relationship between human identity and communicative interaction is particularly significant. He differentiates "discursive" forms of communication, in which material and social differentials (of power, resources, and authority) are bracketed and speakers rely solely on the compelling force of superior argument, from more instrumental or hierarchical forms of communication (e.g., those found in advertising, business negotiations, religious sermons, and so on). These self-reflexive (albeit time-consuming) forms of interaction are intended, not to result in universally binding decisions, but simply to create a provisional understanding (the necessary precondition for decision making) among the members of a given community when normal social or political consensus breaks down. Thus their legitimacy is based, not on the universality of the knowledge produced through discursive interaction, but on the perceived universality of the process of human communication itself. Habermas seeks to preserve the Kantian subject's ability to transcend self-interest while at the same time avoiding the tendency, also evident in Kant, of abstracting ethical judgment from the specific social and material context within which human interaction occurs. For Kant ethical judgment is legitimated by an ostensibly inherent sense of "duty" that is hard-wired into the human consciousness. In a discursive scenario, on the other hand, "maxims of conduct," as Mark Warren writes, "relate to individual needs, interests and situational commitments."<sup>43</sup>

The encounters theorized by Habermas take place in the context of what he famously defined as a "public sphere." Participants in a public sphere must adhere to certain performative rules that insulate this discursive space from the coercion and inequality that constrain human communication in normal daily life. Thus, according to Habermas, "every subject with the competence to speak is allowed to take part in discourse," "everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatsoever," "everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatsoever," and "everyone is allowed to express his or her attitudes, desires and needs."<sup>44</sup> This egalitarian interaction cultivates a sense of "solidarity" among discursive co-



participants, who are, as a result, “intimately linked in an inter-subjectively shared form of life.”<sup>45</sup> While there is no guarantee that these interactions will result in a consensus, we nonetheless endow them with a provisional authority that influences us toward mutual understanding and reconciliation. Further, the very act of participating in these exchanges makes us better able to engage in discursive encounters and decision-making processes in the future.<sup>46</sup> In attempting to present our views to others, we are called upon to articulate them more systematically, to anticipate and internalize our interlocutor’s responses. In this way we are led to see ourselves from the other’s point of view and are thus, at least potentially, able to be more critical and self-aware about our own opinions. This self-critical awareness can lead, in turn, to a capacity to see our views, and our identities, as contingent and subject to creative transformation. We might relate this dynamic of reflexive distancing to Stephen Willats’s collaborations with housing estate residents, in which the act of producing a work about their own environment opens a space from which that environment can be critically perceived and potentially transformed.

Habermas offers relatively few examples of actual discursive interaction, except in his early work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) and in his discussions of “new social movements” in the 1970s.<sup>47</sup> While I do not want to suggest that the dialogical projects I have outlined in this book illustrate Habermas’s discourse theory, I do believe that theory can provide one component of a larger analytic system. First, Habermas’s concept of an identity that is formed through social and discursive interaction can help us understand the position taken up by figures like Willats or the members of WochenKlausur. We typically view the artist as a heroic figure, actualizing his or her will through the transformation of nature or alchemically elevating the primitive, the degraded, and the vernacular into great art. Throughout, the locus of expressive meaning remains the radically autonomous figure of the individual artist. A dialogical aesthetic suggests a very different image of the artist, one defined in terms of openness, of listening (as I have already suggested with reference to Jay Koh), and of a willingness to accept a position of dependence and intersubjective vulnerability relative to the viewer or collaborator.

Habermas’s concept of an “ideal speech situation” captures an important, and related, aspect of these works, evident in WochenKlausur’s “boat trips” on Lake Zurich. The collaborators in this project (the attorneys, councilors, activists, editors, and so on who embarked on these short journeys) were constantly called upon to speak in a definitive and contentious manner in a public space (the courtroom, the editorial page,

parliament) in which dialogue was viewed as a contest of wills. (Cf. Lyotard’s model of “agonistic” communication.) But on the boat trips they were able to speak, and listen, not as delegates and representatives charged with defending a priori positions, but as individuals sharing a substantial collective knowledge of the subject at hand; at the least, these external forces were considerably reduced by the demand for self-reflexive attention created by the ritual and isolation of the boat trip itself. Moreover, the consensus they reached on a response to the drug problem in Zurich was intended, not as a universally applicable solution to the drug crisis as a whole, but rather as a pragmatic response to a very specific aspect of that problem—the homelessness experienced by prostitutes. In his book *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy* (1999), Ken Hirschkop argues for the ongoing relevance of Bakhtin’s work for contemporary politics, focusing on his concept of a “redemptive intersubjectivity.”<sup>48</sup> Hirschkop’s analysis bears directly on the way in which WochenKlausur was able to create a physical and psychological “frame” around the boat talks, setting them apart from daily conversation and allowing the participants to view dialogue not as a tool but as a process of self-transformation. This “ethical dimension” of language, Hirschkop writes,

does not so much add depth to the space and time of language as reorder our sense of what it means to participate in it. It is the dimension we blot out when we respond to language as “practically interested transmission,” letting our immediate and individual needs blind us to those questions which are most sharply posed by our intersubjective situation: our neediness and ultimate vulnerability, the role of the future, and the recognition of others in determining the meaning of our actions.<sup>49</sup>

Habermas’s concept of discursive interaction suggests that there are two key differences between a dialogical and a conventional model of aesthetic experience. The first difference concerns claims of universality. Early modern philosophers rejected the idea of an aesthetic consensus achieved through actual dialogue or consultation with other human subjects because it would fail to provide a sufficiently “objective” or universal standard of judgment. (It was feared that the bulk of society was, as yet, incapable of rational thought.) In large measure this was due to the fact that philosophers such as Kant and Hume were writing in the epistemological shadow of a declining, but still resonant, theological worldview. As a result, the philosophical systems that hoped to compete with this perspective tended to simply replace one form of reassuringly

transcendent authority (God) with another (reason, *sensus communis*, etc.). A dialogical aesthetic, for its part, does not claim to provide, or require, this kind of universal or objective foundation. Rather, it is based on the generation of a local consensual knowledge that is only provisionally binding and that is grounded instead at the level of collective interaction.

Thus the insights that emerge from Willats's collaborations with estate residents are not presented as enduring truths applicable to all people (as is the case in accounts of the transhistorical aesthetic power of Greek sculpture or the synesthesia evoked by the paintings of Kandinsky or Klee). The underlying assumption here is that it is possible to engage in communicative interaction across boundaries of difference without the legitimating framework of a universal discursive system because the necessary framework is established through the interaction itself. Of course we must be realistic about the fallibility of discursive exchange. Like Habermas's "ideal speech situation," the model of a dialogically produced identity I am elaborating is something that these projects tend toward or approximate, rather than reproduce. At the same time, it is necessary to believe that people are at least potentially capable of entering into discursive exchange without immediately succumbing to the snares of negation and self-interest.

The second difference between a dialogical and a conventional model of the aesthetic concerns the specific relationship between identity and discursive experience. In conventional aesthetic experience, the subject is prepared to participate in dialogue through an essentially individual and physical experience of "liking." It is only after passing through the process of aesthetic perception that one's capacity for discursive interaction is enhanced (i.e., one's sensory encounter with the work of art makes one more open-minded or receptive in future social interactions). In a dialogical aesthetic, on the other hand, subjectivity is formed *through* discourse and intersubjective exchange itself. Discourse is not simply a tool to be used to communicate an a priori "content" with other already formed subjects but is itself intended to model subjectivity.

This brings us to a complex point regarding the specific way in which Habermas defines discursive interaction. Several possible criticisms of Habermas's model relate to the bracketing of power differentials among speakers that is a precondition for participation in the public sphere. Habermas tends to underestimate the extent to which the competence necessary to participate in discourse is itself produced by forms of material and social power. Thus his account fails to explain how the ef-

fects of cultural or symbolic capital among privileged speakers, or of hegemonic models of language and rhetoric, can be prevented from biasing discourse. Further, he denies discursive legitimacy to forms of communication (emotive, nonverbal, or gestural, etc.) that cannot be articulated in terms of a system of argument. A second criticism, which has been developed from the point of view of psychoanalytic theory, involves Habermas's assumption that we are, as discursive agents, capable of both identifying and representing our interests in a direct and unmediated manner.<sup>50</sup>

The most relevant criticism of Habermas from the perspective of dialogical art practice relates to his definition of the public sphere as a space of contending opinions and interests, in which the clash of forceful argumentation results in a final winning position that can "compel" the assent of the other parties. Habermas's discursive participants may have their opinions challenged, and even changed, but they enter into, and depart from, discursive interaction as ontologically stable agents. He assumes that as rational subjects we respond only to the "illocutionary force" of the better argument, or "good reasons."<sup>51</sup> But why should we necessarily respond to reason? What makes an argument "good"? With reference to what, or whose, standard, values, or interest is this superior strength or legitimacy determined? Further, what incentive do all these forceful speakers have to suspend their suasive campaigning in order to simply listen? How do we differentiate an assent won by rhetorical attrition from true understanding?

This is why I consider Fiumara's philosophy of listening to be important. A related concept emerges in attempts to define a feminist model of epistemology. In their study *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986), Mary Field Belenky and her co-authors identify what they term "connected knowing," a form of knowledge based, not on counterpoised arguments, but on a conversational mode in which each interlocutor works to identify with the perspective of the others.<sup>52</sup> This "procedural" form of knowledge is defined by two interrelated elements. First, it is concerned with recognizing the social context from which others speak, judge, and act. Rather than hold them accountable to some ideal or generalized standard, it attempts to situate a given discursive statement in the specific material conditions of the speaker. This involves a recognition of the speaker's history (the events or conditions that preceded the speaker's involvement in a given discursive situation) and his or her position relative to modes of social, political, and cultural power both within the discursive situation and outside it (thereby acknowledging the operative

force of forms of social domination that are ostensibly bracketed—and hence disregarded—in the Habermasian public sphere). Thus a speaker with a mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and rhetoric enhanced by a privileged education would communicate very differently from a speaker without such advantages. This does not mean that the insights of the less educated are any less valid, only that they may require a different form of listening.

The second characteristic of connected knowing involves the redefinition of discursive interaction in terms of empathetic identification. Rather than enter into communicative exchange with the goal of representing “self” through the advancement of already formed opinions and judgments, a connected knowledge is grounded in our capacity to identify with other people. It is through empathy that we can learn not simply to suppress self-interest through identification with some putatively universal perspective, or through the irresistible compulsion of logical argument, but literally to redefine self: to both know and feel our connectedness with others. Again, the concept of listening is central to a connected knowledge. In a follow-up volume to *Women’s Way of Knowing (Knowledge, Difference and Power, 1996)*, Patrocínio Schweickart notes Habermas’s tendency to “overvalue” argumentation as a form of knowledge production and his inability to recognize that listening is as active, productive, and complex as speaking: “[T]here is no recognition of the necessity to give an account of listening as doing something. . . . [T]he listener is reduced in Habermas’s theory to the minimal quasi-speaking role of agreeing or disagreeing, silently *saying* yes or no.”<sup>53</sup>

*EMPATHETIC INSIGHT IN LACY AND MANGLANO-OVALLE* The 1999 killings in a Littleton, Colorado, high school by two troubled teenagers occasioned an outpouring of vitriol against the young men and against a decadent or permissive culture that could have encouraged them to commit this heinous act. What was neglected in this response was the extent to which the social environment of the high school itself, with its rigid hierarchies, casual violence, fear of difference, and vindictiveness, played a role in their actions. Although economically and racially privileged, these young men were also largely ostracized from the school’s dominant culture; they were routinely beaten, forced to walk the halls with downcast eyes, and attacked as “faggots” by the school’s ostensibly untroubled elite. This treatment does not justify their actions, but we cannot hope to understand the meaning of these acts (and how to prevent their recurrence) without acknowledging its effects. All too often our cul-

ture indulges in an entirely punitive mentality toward those who are defined as different (something that is even more painfully evident in the general public indifference to the brutalizing impact of “law and order” initiatives and prison expansion in the United States). We seem to have largely lost the capacity for empathy, for imaging ourselves (or our circumstances) as different from who we are (or what they are). This identification can never be complete—we can never claim to fully inhabit the other’s subject position; but we can imagine it, and this imagination, this approximation, can radically alter our sense of who we are. It can become the basis for communication and understanding across differences of race, sexuality, ethnicity, and so on.

Empathy is subject to its own kind of ethical abuse—the arrogance of speaking for others—which I will examine in the next chapter. However, I also feel that a concept of empathetic insight is a necessary component of a dialogical aesthetic. Further, I would contend that the process of collaborative production that occurs in the works I am discussing (involving both verbal and bodily interaction) can help to generate this insight while at the same time allowing for a discursive exchange that can acknowledge, rather than exile, the nonverbal. Loraine Leeson, in her work with non-English-speaking students on *West Meets East*, describes the importance of collaborative exchange framed around images and objects. (“[R]ight from the beginning you have access to layers of embedded meanings, and [you] don’t exclude those who are less confident or proficient in language.”)<sup>54</sup> Empathetic insight can be produced along a series of axes. The first occurs in the rapport between artists and their collaborators, especially in those situations in which the artist is working across boundaries of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or class (in Stephen Willats’s projects, for example). These relationships can be quite difficult to negotiate equitably, as the artist often operates as an outsider, occupying a position of perceived cultural authority. The second axis of empathetic insight occurs among the collaborators themselves (with or without the mediating figure of the artist). Dialogical projects can enhance solidarity among individuals who already share a set of material and cultural circumstances (e.g., work with trade unions by artists such as Fred Lonidier in California or Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge in Canada). The final axis is produced between the collaborators and other communities of viewers (often subsequent to the actual production of a given project). Dialogical works can challenge dominant representations of a given community and create a more complex understanding of, and empathy for, that community among a broader public. These

three functions—solidarity creation, solidarity enhancement, and the counterhegemonic—seldom exist in isolation. Any given project will typically operate in multiple registers.

The work of Suzanne Lacy and T.E.A.M. (Teens + Educators + Artists + Media) provides a useful example of collaboratively generated empathetic insight. *The Roof Is on Fire* (the project in Oakland that I discussed in the introduction) provided the students with a space from which to speak to each other and to a broader audience (whether the audience that actually attended the performance or the viewing public that saw coverage of the piece in the local and national media) that functioned as a rhetorical stand-in for a dominant culture that is far more comfortable telling young people of color what to think than it is with hearing what they have to say. The process of active, creative listening is evident both in Lacy's extensive discussions with the students in developing the project and in the attitude of openness encouraged in the viewer/overhearer by the work itself.<sup>55</sup> This project generated empathetic understanding between Lacy and young people from quite different cultural backgrounds (and among the young people themselves). At the same time, it provided a space for identification between the students and the viewers of the work.

An issue that repeatedly emerged during the rooftop dialogues in this project was the conflict between young people of color and the Oakland police. As a follow-up to the performance, Lacy organized a series of discussions between police and high school students that extended over several weeks. Her goal was to create a "safe" discursive space (reminiscent of WochenKlausur's boat trips) in which young people could speak honestly to the police about their fears and concerns and in which both police and young people could begin to identify with each other as individuals rather than abstractions (the "gangsta" or the "cop"). According to Lacy, "The changes in body language of the ten officers and fifteen youth who met weekly over two months marked a transition from stereotypes to dimensional personalities. I found my own perceptions changing as I encountered police in cars and young people in baggy jeans. Were they one of my friends, someone I know?" This dialogue was followed up by *No Blood/No Fouls*, a "basketball game as performance" between Oakland Police and young people that combined video, interviews with players, dance, and a sound track to explore "how differences and conflicts can be examined without violence." Lacy subsequently worked with the city of Oakland to develop an Oakland Youth Policy addressing issues

of "home, health and safety, education and employment, leadership and the arts."<sup>56</sup>

The "Culture in Action" exhibition organized by Sculpture Chicago during 1992 and 1993 featured a number of projects concerned with the generation of empathetic insight. Curated by Mary Jane Jacob, "Culture in Action" was a landmark in the development of dialogically based art practice in the United States, bringing broader public attention to artists and groups that had been working in this manner for a number of years.<sup>57</sup> A "Culture in Action" project by Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle in Chicago's largely Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Central American West Town neighborhood relates directly to the modes of empathetic insight that I outlined above. Manglano-Ovalle, who lives in West Town, began by proposing a project that would reclaim the neighborhood's social spaces from the threat of gang violence. *Sereno/Tetulia* involved a system of outdoor benches and streetlights intended to encourage the re-creation of the Latin American tradition of *tetulia*: the communal gathering of neighbors on their porches and steps to socialize in the evenings. As Manglano-Ovalle worked on this project, he came to realize that the influence of gang culture on the neighborhood had to be addressed more directly. The gangs were not simply a pathological excrescence on the West Town community. Rather, they performed a positive function, providing a sense of solidarity, collective identification, and respect for young people whose possibilities in life were severely restricted by racism, poverty, and spatial segregation. Unfortunately, these emotional rewards were won at the cost of a self-destructive and violent conflict between rival gangs, each seeking to define itself in opposition to the other.

Manglano-Ovalle decided to develop a project that would encourage empathetic identification between gang members and neighborhood residents across both generational and cultural boundaries. Working in collaboration with Wells High School, Emerson House Community Center, Erie Neighborhood House, and Community Television Network, he proposed the formation of a video collective with the intention of bringing the members of different gangs together through the process of documenting and representing the West Town community. He hoped to lead the various gang factions to envision themselves as part of a larger communal entity. The collective was named Street Level Video (SLV), and their first project, *Tele-Vecindario*, involved interviewing residents of the neighborhood in order to develop an imaginative map of West Town. Tapes were screened at Emerson House and were also shown on a Chi-

ago cable access station. *Tele-Vecindario* evolved into a subsequent project called *Cul de Sac*, featuring a block party, a street parade, outdoor video installations in neighborhood front yards, murals, and a video memorial (*Rest in Peace*) with tapes devoted to victims of gang violence. A crucial component of *Cul de Sac* was the process of negotiating among rival gangs in order to secure spaces to install television monitors and contacting neighborhood residents to provide the electricity to run them. This kind of collaborative and cooperative interaction was important in helping to create new forms of identification among gang members and the residents. The SLV collective continues to operate in Chicago (as Street Level Youth Media) with a wide and growing range of programs.<sup>58</sup> This “afterlife,” which was also evident in Lacy’s work with youth policy in Oakland, is an important feature of dialogical projects.

#### CONCLUSION: LEVINAS, BAKHTIN, AND PERFORMATIVE IDENTITY

The artists I have discussed above begin their work not with the desire to express or articulate an already formed creative vision but rather, as Fiumara has suggested, to listen. Their sense of artistic identity is sufficiently coherent to speak as well as listen, but it remains contingent upon the insights to be derived from their interaction with others and with otherness. They define themselves as artists through their ability to catalyze understanding, to mediate exchange, and to sustain an ongoing process of empathetic identification and critical analysis. I want to conclude by briefly discussing the broader philosophical implications of this approach, especially as they relate to issues that will emerge in my analysis of dialogical projects in the final chapter.

In his study *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity* (1998), Jeffrey T. Nealon examines the constitution of subjectivity in terms of communicative interaction, focusing on Mikhail Bakhtin’s model of “dialogical” experience and Emmanuel Levinas’s concept of “responsibility.” In each case there is an insistence on preserving the “irreducible element in human contact” that resists co-optation by a more general or abstract conceptual power. Thus our capacity for ethical (and one might also say aesthetic) judgment derives not from the heady vantage point of some transcendent subjectivity but from a given “dialogical situation in all its concrete historicity and individuality.”<sup>59</sup> For Levinas and Bakhtin our willingness to interact in an ethical manner with others is not the result of some abstract sense of duty; rather, according to Nealon, “each of them argues that ethics is constitutively linked to

corporeality, the direct experience of ‘lived’ time and place, and our affective and meaningful relationship with concrete others.”<sup>60</sup> Levinas describes intersubjective ethics in terms of the concrete reality of the other experienced through a “face to face” encounter.<sup>61</sup> This “corporeal” interaction is central to a dialogical aesthetic. It is evident in works such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s *Touch Sanitation* (1980), an extended performance in which the artist personally shook hands with, and thanked, more than 8,500 sanitation workers from the New York City Department of Sanitation. Her intention was to publicly acknowledge, through direct physical contact, the positive value of work that is often either ignored or disparaged as unclean.<sup>62</sup>

Levinas and Bakhtin offer alternatives to the violent mastery of conventional Cartesian identity while still preserving a framework that allows the subject to exercise some agency in the world. However, Nealon contends that Bakhtin’s model is unable to entirely avoid the instrumentalizing tendencies of conventional reason. While Bakhtin describes a subjectivity that is formed through dialogical interaction, the ultimate goal of this interaction is the expansion of the authoring subject, for whom the other remains a mere vehicle. Bakhtin’s subject, “like Odysseus,” as Nealon observes, “returns home from experience each time and finds itself changed and enriched, more open to its own possibilities as it travels through different worlds of Otherness. . . . In the end, what is important is authoring my text: the story of my ‘independence, internal freedom, unfinalizability and indeterminacy.’”<sup>63</sup> According to Levinas, in contrast, we should expect no ontological “payoff” from our encounter with the other. Rather than conceive of ethics as a set of behavioral guidelines to be followed by an already formed subject, Levinas views ethics itself as “first philosophy.” For Levinas our very capacity to identify ourselves as subjects is a gift to us from the other. As Nealon suggests, “[T]he ineluctable experience of the other is the founding of selfhood. . . . My ability to think, act, and resist [is] literally from and for the other.”<sup>64</sup>

Levinas suggests a form of identity that can encounter otherness not as an opportunity for transcendence (the “imperialism of the ego,” as he describes it) but as a precondition for agency and subjectivity itself, leading to a kind of “serial epiphany” that can result in “openness” to the other rather than defensiveness and fear.<sup>65</sup> According to Nealon, it is Levinas’s altruistic concern with “concrete” others that differentiates him from Bakhtin, for whom, dialogics notwithstanding, the other still functions as a vehicle for self-realization.<sup>66</sup> But Nealon overlooks a significant



tension in Levinas's account of the other. Levinas does seem to focus on the material specificity of the other. (Experiences such as "the caress" and the "face to face" encounter play a central role in his work.) Levinas fears that this specificity will be sacrificed by conventional reason, which seeks to impose an a priori conceptual framework on the potentially infinite complexity of the other. Here the "I" sees the other as a mere resource, seeking in it a reflection, and confirmation, of self. But to avoid this sort of conceptual violence, the Levinasian subject is precluded from communicating with the other (the act of communication assumes that the other occupies a provisionally finite point of elocutionary authority and receptivity) or, in fact, from having any "knowledge" of the other at all (which would, again, require fixing the other's identity within determinant conceptual or descriptive limits).

The other is less an interlocutor for Levinas than an intuition: an amorphous and undifferentiated event about which we can know nothing and before which the only form of "communication" we can risk is the mute gesture of submission. Language, as such, is less the basis for reciprocal exchange between self and other than a kind of "prayer" or supplication, in response to which the "I" can expect or anticipate no answer.<sup>67</sup> In fact, "reciprocity" itself is anathema, as it could open the door to an interested or calculating relationship in which we would expect something from the other in return for our submission before it.<sup>68</sup> Even the "face to face" encounter is defined by a necessary temporal disjunction between the self and the other (it is a "relation without relation," as Levinas writes), who can never be "contemporaneous" with each other.<sup>69</sup> It is particularly interesting to note the opposition that Levinas establishes between "rhetorical" and "ethical" language. Rhetoric is disparaged because it implies a form of persuasion (and hence manipulation) of the other, while ethical language is not really language at all (in the conventional sense) but an act of "saying" directed to an unknown, and unknowable, interlocutor.<sup>70</sup> Here Levinas recapitulates a fear of discourse that has borne the name of kitsch, theater, and now "rhetoric" (while also echoing Barnett Newman's concept of art as "an address to the unknown").<sup>71</sup>

Any discursive exchange between self and other raises the dreaded possibility that the self might make demands on the other, might expect some ontic payoff or personal gain from their encounter. As a result, and in contradistinction to his concern with specificity, the other takes on an almost metaphysical status in Levinas's writing. It is less the other as a concrete entity situated in space and time than it is the idea of the other

or of otherness and alterity that concerns him. Considered from another perspective, then, Levinas is no less guilty than Bakhtin of treating the other as an abstraction. Moreover, the other is no less subject to the instrumentalizing desire of the self, which requires the other in order to establish its own identity as an ethical subject. Levinas's problematic relationship to the material specificity of the other, his "historical and genealogical deracination," as Luce Irigaray describes it, is evident in his treatment of the feminine other, which functions as a "pseudo-animalistic" foil for an intrinsically "masculine" subject. Woman is that which is subject to love (beloved, or *aimée*) but not that which is capable of love in turn. The feminine in Levinas, as Irigaray writes, "does not stand for an other to be respected in her human freedom and human identity. The feminine other is left without her own specific face."<sup>72</sup>

These questions of agency lead to a related issue. What is the status of the self and the self-other relationship as outlined by Levinas? Is he describing the actual process through which we encounter difference or an ideal form of intersubjective experience toward which we should strive? Or is this meant to be an account of the way in which we would "naturally" approach otherness were it not for the destructive ontological conditioning imposed on us by Western tradition?<sup>73</sup> Does the "I" in fact require the presence of the other as a catalyst to achieve this form of ethical insight? Nealon speaks of encounters with the other as "serial epiphanies." But what happens in those periods *between* our encounters with otherness? Do we relapse into egoism and coherence? Or are we simply awaiting a single self-transforming encounter with the other that will catapult us, once and for all, into a recognition of the "wonder of the infinite"?<sup>74</sup> Further, how can one take up a position of responsibility to the other without some understanding of its social specificity? Simply stating that the "I" is defined by a prior sense of obligation to the other does not tell us what kinds of subjectivity or agency might be subsequently mobilized on the basis of this responsibility.<sup>75</sup> How can we evaluate the relative benefit or harm caused by our actions on the other's behalf without some way in which to interact with, and learn from, it discursively? In short, what would a Levinasian practice look like? This confusion is exacerbated by the fact that Levinas provides few concrete examples of the kinds of interactions he describes.

There appears to be no possibility in Levinas's analysis that the encounter with otherness could in fact lead the self away from the blandishments of mastery and "ego imperialism" in subsequent encounters with a more concrete interlocutor. The other must remain perpetually



beyond discursive reach, and the self must be denied the use of language and even temporal coexistence with the other now and forever. In his analysis of the conventional Odyssean subject, Nealon describes a process by which the indeterminate “excess” of otherness (the infinite complexity of the self that lies beyond discourse) always “accrues” to the vampirelike self at the expense of the other; the “I” emerges from its encounter with alterity ontologically enriched, more complex, and more expansive, while the other is drained of its material specificity and reduced to pale abstraction. The only way to avoid this outcome is to eliminate discursive interaction entirely. Here again, we have the characteristic opposition between discourse and counterdiscourse: an unforgiving instrumentalization (defined by rhetorical manipulation) on the one hand and the total proscription of intersubjective exchange on the other.

Nealon’s analysis assumes a kind of zero-sum economy in which the prediscursive “excess” must be accumulated by a single participant: either the Odyssean self or the other (which becomes, for Levinas, a repository of ontic richness and mystery, even as the self is abased before it). Excess thus takes the form of an ontological currency that can only be “spent” by an individual subject rather than shared between the self and the other. But Bakhtin argues that dialogical exchange can have precisely this reciprocal effect: that the result of a dialogical encounter is to open both participants to the “excess” that is made possible by the provisional blurring of boundaries between self and other. This reciprocal, rather than sacrificial, view of intersubjectivity is essential to a dialogical aesthetic. Rather than seek indeterminateness and excess in an object that resists conceptual classification (as in the traditions of modern and postmodern formalism) or in an epistemologically sequestered other (Levinas’s other-beyond-discourse), Bakhtin will locate it in the act of dialogue itself, as the unexpected insights achieved via collaborative interaction produce new forms of subjectivity. As with Nealon’s criticism of Bakhtin, the dialogical artist will find his or her identity “enriched” or expanded through collaborative interaction, but so, arguably, will his or her collaborators. Is it possible to conceive of this ontic payoff not as a singular possession to be won or lost at the expense of another but as a collectively realized event?

Nealon’s criticism of the nomadic Odyssean subject is useful (I will develop a related analysis in Chapter 4), and in fact we can locate concrete examples of it in community-based practices in which the artist functions as a kind of tourist of the disempowered, traveling from one site of poverty and oppression to the next and allowing his or her various

collaborators to temporarily inhabit the privileged position of the expressive creator. But we also need a way to understand how identity might change over time—not through some instantaneous thunderclap of insight but through a more subtle, and no doubt imperfect, process of collectively generated and cumulatively experienced transformation passing through phases of coherence, vulnerability, dissolution, and re-coherence. This seems to me much closer to the spirit of the projects that I am discussing here. If Levinas reminds us of the pervasive power of “egoicity” in our relationships to others, Bakhtin holds out the hope that this tendency can be undone by something other than mute supplication.

Ultimately it may not be possible to square the circle between Levinas and Bakhtin, between the dangers of domination and the demands of agency and sociality, and perhaps it is not necessary to do so. The constant trumping of ontological purity (the drive to move philosophy forward by devising more and more elaborate systems for defining a subject entirely purged of the capacity for ontological negation) faces the law of diminishing returns. While it is important to locate ethical models for intersubjective experience, it is also necessary, at least for my investigation here, to bring these models into some strategic relationship to the quotidian practice of human interaction. It is in the nature of dialogical projects to be impure, to represent a practical negotiation (self-reflexive but nonetheless compromised) around issues of power, identity, and difference, even as they strive toward something more. In the remaining chapters I will examine these negotiations in greater detail, exploring the complex relationships that unfold within them between empathy and negation, domination and dialogue, and self and other.

theoretically rational unity of its experience, the recognition that this unity is being destroyed by its own behavior disposes it, over the long run, to modify that behavior." *Ibid.*, p. 190.

53. The Kantian subject, according to Piper, is motivated by the desire to render experience "rationally intelligible" as part of "more general, motivationally effective norm-generated concepts." *Ibid.*, p. 184.

54. Piper, *Out of Order*, vol. 1, p. 248.

55. According to Piper, xenophobia represents the act of "withholding recognition of personhood" (a generalized concept) from specific subjects who are, in fact, "persons." "As a transcendent concept (or idea), the concept of personhood gives coherence to our occasional, particular empirical experiences of these characteristics of human experience by unifying them under this more abstract and inclusive notion that surpasses in scope of application any particular instance of human behavior that conforms to it." Adrian M. S. Piper, "Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism," *Philosophical Forum* 24 (Fall-Spring 1992-93): 200.

56. Piper, *Out of Order*, vol. 2, p. 132. This pseudorationality is not a necessary condition (as Piper writes, it is not "hard-wired" into us); rather, it is "contingent on such empirical conditions as upbringing, degree of exposure to diversity or integration, and peer-group reinforcement—and therefore revisable in light of new experience." Piper, "Xenophobia," p. 194.

57. Aside from the subject-predicate relationship, which constitutes an a priori condition for knowledge of the world, our existing conceptual apparatus is neither transcendent nor universal; rather, Piper writes, it is "formed in response to particular empirical contexts." She draws here on the relationship between "transcendental" and "empirical" concepts outlined in the *Critique of Reason*, arguing that while Kant introduces this distinction he fails to fully elaborate its epistemological implications. Piper, "Xenophobia," pp. 190-95.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

59. For a Kantian subject, "human difference" is "intrinsically interesting and therefore worthy of regard," while "conformity to one's honorific stereotypes [is] intrinsically uninteresting." The Kantian subject views "anomalous others as opportunities for psychological growth rather than mere threats to psychological integrity." *Ibid.*, p. 225.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 193, 201.

61. Adrian M. S. Piper, "Impartiality, Compassion and Modal Imagination," *Ethics* 101 (July 1991): 726. "To empathize with another is to comprehend viscerally the inner state that motivates the other's overt behavior by experiencing concurrently with that behavior a correspondingly similar inner state oneself. . . . We must modally imagine to ourselves what that state must be as we observe her own overt behavior." *Ibid.*, p. 737.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 739. "The more radically I get it wrong when imaging the analog of your inner state in myself, the less I succeed in understanding yours. The less I succeed in understanding yours, the more the coordination of our actions must depend on convention or force or detailed verbal agreement." *Ibid.*, p. 738.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 735.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 745.

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 741-42, 744.

66. Adrian Piper, *Out of Order*, vol. 2, p. 50.

67. Phone interview with Adrian Piper, December 14, 1997.

68. Ken Johnson, "Being and Politics," *Art in America* 78 (September 1990): 154.

69. Phone interview with Ken Johnson, November 20, 1997. Johnson's criticism of Piper has become increasingly strident. In his review of her 2000 retrospective at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, he dismisses her work as "psychological manipulation" with the "touch of a sledgehammer." "Galleries," *New York Times*, November 17, 2000, retrieved from www.nytimes.com.

70. See, for example, Dave Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993).

71. Adrian Piper, *Out of Order*, vol. 2, pp. 175-81.

72. "For example, black viewers have often told me that they feel a sense of positive affirmation and even pleasure in the works." Phone interview with Adrian Piper, December 14, 1997.

#### CHAPTER 3. DIALOGICAL AESTHETICS

1. "If we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual it becomes automatic. . . . Habituation devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. . . . [A]t exists that one may recover the sensation of life. . . . [Its function is] to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception." Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Art in Theory: 1900-1990*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1992), p. 277. Also see Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981).

2. See Erwin Piscator, *The Political Theater*, trans. Hugh Morrison (New York: Avon Books, 1978), and Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theater*, trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

3. Bertolt Brecht, "Theater for Pleasure or Theater for Instruction," in Brecht, *Brecht on Theater*, p. 71.

4. David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), p. 216.

5. On theories of "symbolic resistance," see Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).

6. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 238.

7. Brecht, *Brecht on Theater*, p. 71. Juliet Koss provides a useful overview of the relative status of empathy and alienation in Brecht's work in her essay "Playing Politics with Estranged and Empathetic Audiences: Bertolt Brecht and Georg Fuchs," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 96 (Fall 1997): 809-20.

8. The almost reflexive tendency to describe works of art in terms of "shock" is evident in a recent article on Jeff Koons by Ingrid Sischy. Thus Koons's *New Series* (1980), which featured upright vacuum cleaners in Plexiglas cases, "gives the viewer a series of shocks—the shock, say, that vacuum cleaners have been

recontextualized as art, and the shock that they look so beautiful." Later on we discover that curator Kirk Varnedoe was "knocked dead" by Koons's stainless steel cast of an inflatable rabbit (*Rabbit*, 1986): "This piece was just riveting. You wanted to laugh, you were shocked, you were planted to the floor." And David Sylvester, convinced that Koons is a "great artist," compares him favorably to the Surrealists: "The Surrealists tried to be shocking. I thought, Koons really is shocking." Ingrid Sischy, "Koons, High and Low," *Vanity Fair*, no. 487 (March 2001): 217, 272, 274.

9. It is worth noting here that Lyotard's reading of the sublime differs considerably from Kant's analysis in the third *Critique*. For Kant the sublime is, initially, differentiated from the beautiful by its transgressive character. However, according to Kant, the transgressive power of the sublime, its capacity to exceed sensual apprehension and literally render us speechless, ultimately returns us to the moral law (as Werner Pluhar writes, "[T]he sublime is judged subjectively purposive with regard to moral feeling"). Through sublime experience we become all the more conscious of our dependence on what Kant calls a "susceptible" power in the human mind (the "sublime is what . . . proves that the mind has a power surpassing any standard of sense"). We return from the experience of the sublime all the more firmly obedient to the "concepts" that allow us to make sense of our experience. Werner Pluhar, translator's introduction to *Critique of Judgment*, by Immanuel Kant (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), p. lxx; Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p.106/Ak250.

10. Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1999), p. 206. Also see Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

11. "The art object no longer bends itself to models, but tries to present the fact that there is an un-representable; it no longer imitates nature. . . . [T]he social community no longer recognizes itself in art objects, but ignores them, rejects them as incomprehensible." Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," p. 206.

12. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 10.

13. Adolph Gottlieb, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman, "Statement" (1943), in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, p. 562.

14. Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, "Excerpt from *Du Cubisme*," in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, p. 195. As they write, "The artist . . . forces the crowd, confronted by his integrated plastic consciousness, to adopt the same relationship he established with nature" (p. 190).

15. David Smith, "Aesthetics, the Artist and the Audience" (1952), in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, p. 578. Serra's quote is from "The Storm in the Plaza" (transcripts from the General Services Administration's public hearings over *Tilted Arc*), *Harpers* 271, no. 1622 (July 1985): 27.

16. Anthony J. Cascardi, "The Difficulty of Art," *Boundary* 2 25, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 49.

17. Stephen Willats, *The New Reality* (Londonderry, England: Orchard Gallery, 1992).

18. Grant Kester, "Starting from Zero: Stephen Willats and the Pragmatics of Public Art," *Afterimage* 19 (May 1992): 10.

19. On Pat Purdy and *The Kids Are in the Street*, see Willats, *The New Reality*. Information on *Are You Good Enough for the Cha Cha Cha?* is in Stephen Willats, *Three Essays* (London: Institute for Contemporary Art, 1986).

20. Willats, *The New Reality*, p. 31. "In responding to the question," Willats writes, "the audience immediately start to make explicit what they have taken as implicit, and by further entering into the symbolic world held in the artwork and conjoining the references into a model . . . they construct their own parallel world into a coherent resistance to the determinants of the new reality" (p. 16).

21. Hans Robert Kögler, *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault*, trans. Paul Hendrickson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1999), pp. 262, 263.

22. "The concrete buildings of modernism," Willats writes, "radiate . . . a powerful message about the nature of modern life [and] an institutionalized culture that is ultimately highly reductive and deterministic." Stephen Willats, *Conceptual Living* (London: Victoria Miro Gallery, 1991), p. 1. On the Brentford Towers project, see *AND: Journal of Art and Education* 13-14 (1987): 9. The quotes are from a project at Avondale Estates in London, *I Don't Want to Be Like Anyone Else* (1977), discussed in Willats, *Conceptual Living*.

23. On *Private Icons*, see Stephen Willats, *Three Essays*, pp. 14-17.

24. Wolfgang Zinggl, "Concrete and Effective Intervention: The Austrian Artist-Cooperative WochenKlausur," 1998, retrieved from the WochenKlausur Web site, [http://wochenklausur.to.or.at/index\\_e.htm](http://wochenklausur.to.or.at/index_e.htm), which also contains information on most of WochenKlausur's projects. See also Wolfgang Zinggl, "Eine Konkrete Intervention," in *Kunstler und Kunstlerinnen zur Dogenproblematik* (Zurich: WErD, 1994), p. 22.

25. "Intervention in a School," retrieved April 8, 2003, from WochenKlausur Web site: [http://wochenklausur.to.or.at/projekte/05p\\_lang\\_en.htm](http://wochenklausur.to.or.at/projekte/05p_lang_en.htm).

26. "Intervention to Improve Conditions in Deportation Detention," retrieved April 8, 2003, from WochenKlausur Web site: [http://wochenklausur.to.or.at/projekte/06p\\_kurz\\_en.htm](http://wochenklausur.to.or.at/projekte/06p_kurz_en.htm).

27. Zinggl, "Concrete and Effective Intervention"; George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1997).

28. This and the preceding quotes are from Zinggl, "Concrete and Effective Intervention."

29. Interview with Jay Koh, March 10, 1999. Portions of the following material were first published in Grant H. Kester, "The Art of Listening (and of Being Heard): Jay Koh's Discursive Networks," *Third Text* 47 (Summer 1999): 19-26.

30. For information on Koh's work and on arting and IFIMA, see the Web site: <http://home.density.com/ifima/>.

31. *Auszeit der Demokratie: Ein Kunstprojekt*, ed. Jay Koh (Köln: Vilter-Verlag, 1993).

32. In the mid-eighteenth century, the Jesuit missionary Père d'Entrecolles recorded his impressions of one of the first "hongs," or factories, established in China by the East India Company. D'Entrecolles describes the "vast sheds" in the East India facility at Jingdezhen, which were filled with "a large number of workers who each have their appointed task . . . one piece of fired porcelain passes through the hands of seventy workers." As this account reminds us, phenomena such as globalism, the division of labor, and "offshore" sourcing are hardly unique to the current high-tech economy. *Sotheby's Concise Encyclopedia of Porcelain*, ed. David Battie (London: Conran Octopus, 1990), p. 58.

33. From Jay Koh, "The Doctrine of Cultural Supremacy," manuscript. Typically, as in the much-touted exhibition "Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions," organized by the Asia Society in New York in 1996, a single Asian voice is selected as the privileged spokesperson for "Asian" art (in this case Thai critic and historian Apinan Poshyananda). This surrogate gatekeeper is then forced to negotiate the identity of Asian culture with a phalanx of Western funders, consultants, critics, curators, and institutions. In this context, works that call too much attention to the troubling political complicities between the West and the East are decorously pruned (as in the noticeable absence in *Traditions/Tensions* of contemporary Indonesian art dealing with Western support of the Suharto regime and the massacres in East Timor or of Thai art that is critical of the influence of American culture in Thailand, by figures such as Vasan Sittikheth).

34. Koh, "Doctrine of Cultural Supremacy."

35. These accounts are taken from interviews with Jay Koh and Stefan Roemer, November 1998.

36. Stefan Roemer, *Tomorrow Is Another Day: A Video Criticism of Rirkrit Tiravanija's Exhibition "Tomorrow Is Another Day" at the Kölmschen Kunstverein* (Cologne: Kölner Videomagazin N-TV, January 1997), video. My translation.

37. Interview with Jay Koh, November 1998.

38. Jay Koh, preface to *E.T.: Exchanging Thought* (Chiang Mai Social Installation Art and Culture Festival, Chiang Mai, Thailand, March 6, 1998), ed. Jay Koh (Cologne: SK Stiftung Kultur, 1998), p. 1.

39. Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Language* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 9, 23.

40. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 62/Ak-218.

41. As Saussure writes in *Cours de linguistique générale*: "By distinguishing between the language itself and speech, we distinguish at the same time between: (1) what is social from what is individual, and (2) what is essential from what is ancillary and more or less accidental. The language itself is not a function of the speaker. It is the product passively registered by the individual." Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. and annot. Roy Harris (London: Duckworth, 1983), p. 14.

42. I must also note the important work that Bruce Barber at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design has done on the implications of Habermas for "Littoral" art practices (the reference is to a series of conferences on activist art held over the past several years in Manchester, Sydney, and Dublin). In his essay "The Gift in Littoral Art Practice," Barber establishes a connection between commu-

nicative action and Marcel Mauss's concept of the "gift" in recent collaborative art practice. Versions of this essay have been published in *Fuse 19* (Winter 1996) and *Intervention: Post-Object and Performance Art in New Zealand in 1970 and Beyond*, ed. Jennifer Hay (Christchurch, New Zealand: Robert MacDougall Art Gallery and Annex Press, 2000), pp. 49-58. The text is posted at <http://novelsquat.com/gift.html>. Also see "Squatting on Shifting Grounds: An Interview with Bruce Barber and Catherine Grant," *Afterimage 29* (July-August 2001): 10-11.

43. Mark E. Warren, "The Self in Discursive Democracy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, ed. Stephen K. White (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 178.

44. Jürgen Habermas, "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification" in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), p. 89.

45. Jürgen Habermas, "Justice and Solidarity," *Philosophical Forum 21* (1989-90): 47.

46. Mark Warren describes this as the "self-transformation" thesis in Habermas's work. See Warren, "The Self in Discursive Democracy," pp. 172, 178.

47. See Jürgen Habermas, "On Social Identity," *Telos 19* (Spring 1974): 91-103. For the 7th Istanbul Biennial (2001), an artist's collective called the Kahve Society (*kahve* is Turkish for "coffee" and "café") organized a series of conversations in London and Istanbul, based on a critical appropriation of the coffee-house model. *A Coffee-House Conversation on the International Art World and Its Exclusions (at the time of the 7th Istanbul Biennial)* was published as an e-book by the Kahve Society in association with Autograph and the Institute for Digital Art and Technology. It is available free in PDF format from [www.kahve-house.com/society/conversations](http://www.kahve-house.com/society/conversations).

48. Ken Hirschkop, *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 57.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

50. Deborah Cook provides a useful critique of Habermas's idealistic view of dialogue in the context of the modern state in "The Talking Cure in Habermas's Republic," *New Left Review 12* (November-December 2001): 135-51.

51. See Jürgen Habermas, "Some Distinctions in Universal Pragmatics," *Theory and Society 3* (1976): 155-67, and Habermas, "Discourse Ethics," p. 90.

52. Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, eds., *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986). Also see Nöelle McAfee's novel attempt to reconcile Habermas's notion of a communicative identity with Julia Kristeva's work on split subjectivity in *Habermas, Kristeva and Citizenship* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000).

53. Patrocínio P. Schweickart, "Speech Is Silver, Silence Is Gold: The Asymmetrical Intersubjectivity of Communicative Action," in *Knowledge, Difference and Power: Essays Inspired by Women's Ways of Knowing*, ed. Nancy Rule Goldberger, Jill Mattuck Tarule, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, and Mary Field Belenky (New York: Basic Books, 1996), p. 317.

54. E-mail message from Loraine Leeson, December 6, 2001.

55. In her essay "Connective Aesthetics: Art after Individualism," Suzi Gablik describes Lacy's work in these terms: "Emphatic listening makes room for the Other and decentralizes the ego-self. Giving each person a voice is what builds community and makes art socially responsive. Interaction becomes the medium of expression, an emphatic way of seeing through another's eyes." Suzi Gablik, "Connective Aesthetics," in *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, ed. Suzanne Lacy (Seattle: Bay Press, 1996), p. 82. Gablik goes on to cite Michael Levin from *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*: "This may be the time, the appropriate historical moment, to encourage and promote a shift in paradigms, a cultural drift that, to some extent, seems already to be taking place. I am referring, of course, to the drift from seeing to listening, and to the historical potential for a paradigm shift displacing vision and installing a very different influence of listening" (p. 83).

56. The above quotes are from Suzanne Lacy, "The Roof Is on Fire," retrieved April 8, 2003, from the National Endowment for the Arts Web site: <http://204.178.35.192/artforms/Museums/Lacy.html>.

57. See Mary Jane Jacob et al., *Culture in Action: A Public Art Program of Sculpture Chicago* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

58. The Street Level Youth Media Web site is [www.street-level.org/](http://www.street-level.org/).

59. Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 37.

60. Ibid.

61. See Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics and the Face" (sec. III, B), in *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1961).

62. Robert C. Morgan, "Touch Sanitation: Mierle Laderman Ukeles," in *The Citizen Artist: Twenty Years of Art in the Public Arena*, vol. 1, ed. Linda Frye Burnham and Steven Durland (Gardiner, N.Y.: Critical Press, 1998), pp. 55-60.

63. Nealon, *Alterity Politics*, pp. 42, 47. The reference to Odysseus is from Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. It is interesting to compare this reading of identity to Stephen Melville's view of the relationship between painting and theatricality, discussed in Chapter 2 of this book.

64. Nealon, *Alterity Politics*, pp. 35, 39.

65. Ibid., p. 39. "But in knowledge there also appears the notion of an intellectual activity or of a reasoning will—a way of doing something which consists precisely of thinking through knowing, of seizing something and making it one's own, of reducing to presence and representing the difference of being, an activity which *appropriates* and *grasps* the otherness of the known." Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Séan Hand (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1989), p. 76. Levinas describes the "imperialism of the ego" in *Otherwise Than Being*, excerpted in *The Levinas Reader*, p. 118.

66. As Derrida writes in "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," "[T]he true name of this inclination of thought to the Other, of this resigned acceptance of incoherent incoherence inspired by a truth more profound than the 'logic' of philosophical discourse, the true name of this renunciation of the concept, of the a prioris and transcendental horizons of language is *empiricism*. . . . It is the *dream* of a purely *heterological* thought at its source. A *pure* thought of *pure* difference. We say the *dream* because it

must vanish *at daybreak*, as soon as language awakens." Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. and introd. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 151.

67. See Emmanuel Levinas, "Language as a Prayer," in Andreas Valevicius, ed., *From the Other to the Totally Other: The Religious Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), pp. 75-92.

68. The parallels here to an aesthetic "disinterest" in which the object is no longer exposed to our instrumentalizing desire by being reduced to an image is striking.

69. Emmanuel Levinas, *Théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (1930; reprint, Paris: Vrin, 1970), pp. 79-80. As Colin Davis notes, citing Levinas, "[T]he face is not the object of 'experience in the sensible sense of the term, relative and egoist.' It is an epiphany or revelation rather than an object of perception or knowledge." Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1996), pp. 45-46. And as Levinas writes in *Time and the Other* (1947, English trans. 1987), "[A]lterity appears as a non-reciprocal relationship—that is, as contrasting strongly with contemporaneity. The Other as Other is not only an alter ego: the Other is what I myself am not. The Other is this, not because of the Other's character or physiognomy, or psychology, but because of the Other's very alterity." Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other (and Additional Essays)*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1987), p. 83. Also see the translator's introduction to that book, p. 12.

70. On Levinas's "denigration" of rhetoric, see Jill Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 56.

71. As Derrida writes: "In the last analysis, according to Levinas, nonviolent language would be a language which would do without the verb *to be*, that is, without predication. Predication is the first violence. Since the verb *to be* and the predicative act are implied in every other verb, and in every common noun, nonviolent language, in the last analysis, would be a language of pure invocation, pure adoration, proffering only proper nouns in order to call to the other from afar." Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," p. 147.

72. Luce Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Divinity of Love," *Re-reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 112, 113.

73. As Irigaray asks, is the other "a postulate, the projection or the remnant of a system, a hermeneutic locus?" Ibid., p. 112.

74. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (1969), reprinted in Valevicius, *From the Other*, p. 46.

75. See, for example, Ken Hirschkop's analysis of the relationship between sympathy and agency in *Mikhail Bakhtin*, pp. 62-64.

#### CHAPTER 4. A CRITICAL FRAMEWORK FOR DIALOGICAL PRACTICE

1. GAAG (Jon Hendricks, Poppy Johnson, Silvianna, and Jean Toche) also staged actions inside museums and galleries, as well as sending open letters, sug-