

CURATING NOW: IMAGINATIV

Edited by Paula Marincola

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QUESTIONS OF PRACTICE

Curating Now: Imaginative Practice/Public Responsibility **Morning Session: Sunday, October 15, 2000**

Edited by Paula Marincola

PHILADELPHIA EXHIBITIONS INITIATIVE



CURATING NOW MORNING SESSION SUNDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2000

Institute of Contemporary Art



RESPONSE

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It's very nice to be here in Philadelphia. I was trying to think of the turn on W. C. Fields's epitaph—that, probably, on the whole, I'd rather be dead. But that's not it, since I really appreciate this opportunity. Although I have to doubt the wisdom of The Pew Charitable Trusts in bringing a person like myself here to address a group of people who represent more capital leverage, more institutional authority, and more political power than the entire continent of Latin America. Here's what Pew has done: They have asked a private citizen, who lives in a small apartment in a small city in the middle of the desert, who teaches at a small university where they don't like him, who writes periodical art journalism, the weakest kind of writing you can do, to respond to your discussions of curating. And so I shall, and you may take everything I say with that very large grain of salt. I realize, as I look around, that I am probably the senior person in this room, so the future is almost certainly yours.

I do, however, have thirty-five years of experience in various ghettos of the art world. I also come to you informed by the absolute certainty that, had the museum world that I first encountered been like the museum world today, I should not be doing what I am doing. In an effort to show my hand, then, I should make clear my predilections in this area at the outset.

So, what is a museum? For me, it's a site upon which those with power to do so share their pleasures and enthusiasms with their fellow citizens. In this regard, I like to quote Christopher Knight's remark that "the best thing about living in a democracy is that anybody can be an elitist." The first time I heard this remark, I asked myself: What are the privileges of a democratic elitist? I think those privileges are to have the state afford you with a site for elite contemplation, with a refuge from commerce, with a refuge from fashion, with a refuge from relevance, and with a refuge from education—that is, from all of the evils of our obsessively historicized culture. The museum, as this sort of site, as this sort of refuge, is a site upon which new meanings can be derived and new value can be adjudicated.

This, I would suggest, is the content and subject matter of ninety percent of the conversations that you hear in museums. Ninety percent of the questions that people ask themselves and one another come down to this: Is it any good or not? In truth, I don't think there's any serious discourse of art that doesn't begin with the discourse of value, with a preferential choice. Since I am taking issue

here with the pervasive jihad that has been waged against the idea of quality and value in art for about twenty years or so—on the Little League principle that every tyke gets to play—let me digress here for a moment and clarify.

In my view, when we talk about quality in art, we are, invariably, displacing some quantity of our own response, so that when we say a work of art is good or that it has quality, what we mean is that some quantitative measure in our own response invests it with value. What we are saying, really, is: Wow, I can look at this for a long time; wow, this makes me really excited; wow, I can write a whole lot of words about this (my favorite); or, wow, this is really expensive; or, wow, I want to take this home and look at it for a long time; or, wow, this work is so memorable that I can go home without having bought it and think about it for a long time. These are all quantitative measures that invest art with its perpetuity. They all measure one thing: the extent to which a work of art presents itself to us as the incarnation of values that we value.

Having said this, we may ask, what is the task of a curator? In my view, curators are appointed conservators, not elected officials. They are facilitators and practitioners of a secondary practice, as critics are. The curator's job, in my view, is to tell the truth, to show her or his hand, and get out of the way. If you can do that, I think you're okay. People come to the museum to figure out for themselves what they think is good—to engage in a general discourse of value—to ascertain or discover in works of art values that they value. Curators help, and, having said this, I should explain to you why I'm a critic and not a curator, absolutely not a curator, although I have just taken a job curating an international exhibition next summer in Santa Fe.

The first thing I realized when I took this job is that I'm not a curator. I can do one show, and I can put the artists I like in it, and then, if I had to, I could do the next show, which would include the artists that I wanted to put in this show and couldn't get in the room. Then, I could do a third show of all the artists I like who are really different from the artists who were in those first two shows. After that, my curating career would be over. Simply put, I don't like enough art to be a curator. I'm being dead serious here. I do not like enough artists to be a curator. I do not like enough of the art world to be a curator. That's not my job. My job is to sit in my little room and type.

The second reason I couldn't be a curator is that, for the purposes of critical argument, I propose fugitive and mildly silly ideas about art that make small points. I just wrote a short catalog introduction for a Robert Rauschenberg show, and, for the purposes of this little essay, I was talking about Rauschenberg as a Southerner. I compared him to William Faulkner and to Thomas Wolfe, to Louis Armstrong and to Duane Allman, by relating the tropical profusion and organic density of their production—likening the generative, tropical attitude that

the work of all five artists seems to embody. That's okay for a catalog. It makes a small, relevant point about Rauschenberg, but it would make a really *hideous* exhibition. "Rauschenberg's Yoknapatawpha County." Not only that, it would make a hideous exhibition that Ned [Rifkin] would have taken were he still in Atlanta, because it fulfills regional, cultural, racial, and interdisciplinary criteria that museums, at present, deify. It would still be a hideous show. So, again, that's why I'm not a curator. I have dumb ideas that are okay for about the time it takes to read the sentence, but not any more than that, although I routinely see exhibitions based on correlations no less whimsical.

In other words, criticism is not curating, although critics and curators do have parallel pathologies: We habitually mistake the practice of artists for our own. Critics, for instance, do critique. We write about things that are absent from what we write, and, occasionally, we seduce ourselves into thinking that artists do critique as well. We succumb to the fantasy that art is "about" something, that it's "critiquing" something. In my experience, art does no such thing; it provides a correlative presence in the world for the adjudication of value. Critics write "about" things; art is the something we write about. Curators, on the other hand, have a democratic, governmental mandate to do what all democratic governmental functionaries do, which is to mitigate the inequities of commercial society. All curators have this responsibility. All public officials have this responsibility. Art, however, does not have this responsibility. It is the job of curators to mitigate the inequities of this culture. It is not the job of artists to mitigate the inequities of this culture. If you ask artists to do that, you're asking them to be government officials. You are asking them to promote the regulations by which you must abide and the ethics by which you must function. Artists are supposed to make art. They don't do government. They don't do critique. The presumption of critics that artists do critique, the presumption of curators that artists do social engineering, results in covert, and often inadvertent, ideological censorship. As curators and as critics, of course, we all tend to privilege those people who do not have the same opportunities that others do. If, however, we choose to privilege the expression of a person of color from a small regional town, is it really fair to ask them to do our job for us? If this person of color from the small regional town wishes to compete with Ross Bleckner in the genre of salon abstraction, it should be fine with all of us. What I'm saying is that our public responsibilities do not pass on to the artists we write about and select for exhibitions.

I'd also like to note a difference that I discovered yesterday between critics and curators. Critics seem to have rules, you know, even if they are only rules of thumb. I have rules. My two primary rules, developed over the years, are, first, to do everything that I do with a whole heart and with a passionate commitment, and, second, to never lose sight of the frivolity and smallness of the endeavor that

I'm involved in. I write about things in the world that people look at, sometimes pay for, and sometimes just walk by. This is not a big deal. It may have large consequences, but it is not a big deal. My secondary rules are these: Make it shorter, make it clearer, make it personally more persuasive, and make it less institutionally coercive. Again, criticism and curating are secondary practices. Our job is to get out of the way.

There are also some ancillary rules that seem to me to apply to both criticism and to curating. First: Never oversell your own product. If you pretend that it's more than it is, you will lose in the long run. Somebody will come up and say, Hey, the emperor doesn't have any clothes on; and you will say, oh, yes he does! And then they will say, hey, not only is the emperor naked, the emperor is *dead*. And you will have no defense. So, you should never claim as true anything that is not self-evident. I mention this because, yesterday, I heard what I would consider to be some absolutely outrageous claims for the efficacy of works of art—claims that I cannot imagine defenses or proofs for. And if an overeducated professional like myself can't imagine them, I want you to imagine what the public thinks.

My second ancillary rule is, never use your sales talk on your peers. We all have a line of public bullshit with regard to the civic virtue of art. Sometimes, it's necessary. It's how we get paid. We tug our forelocks to that hopeful fantasy of public utility, but we don't play that game on our peers. Public discourse and professional discourse are not the same thing. Public discourse necessarily involves positive generalities; professional discourse should concern itself qualifying specifics. What I'm trying to suggest here (and, again, I'm being a critic; that's what you're paying me for) is that I did not hear *any* discussion yesterday on the limitations of curatorial power and practice. Everyone seemed to have a limitless ambition and limitless goals. Nothing about verboten practices—nothing about ethical gray areas in the promotion, presentation, and interpretation of art was mentioned—so I think we should all remember this: Somebody has to do something before we can do anything. Somebody has to do something before we can do anything.

What I heard yesterday was a clearly voiced aspiration for curatorial practice to share the role of the artist and usurp the role of the patron—a mandate for curators to function not as selectors of art but as patrons of *artists*, as integral parts of the art process. What I heard yesterday was a discourse about artists—a totally artist-centered discourse. There was no talk about art. None. Only about artists and working “with” artists and commissioning artists. Obviously, you all like artists better than I do, but I wonder if that's the function of the curator, you know? Are you really accredited in aesthetic midwifery? I don't know. And from whence do you derive your authority to function as patrons to a large, democratic

culture? I don't know. I also discerned another ambient idea, derived from this, that the curator is sort of a moral money launderer—that public institutions have all this dirty money coming in from corrupt corporations, dealers, and patrons that magically passes through the curator, as the river of grace passes through the Virgin, and is thus transubstantiated by his or her ethics and passion and vision. This came as a big surprise to me—the idea that curators function as a screen of virtue through which the wicked money of commercial culture flows and is redeemed. In my view, this is nothing more than an arrogant institutional rationalization for intervening between the artist and the money. Just the sort of thing institutions accuse dealers of doing.

I also heard a couple of remarks yesterday about the task of the museum, and of the curator, to educate the patron classes. Now, I don't know about you kids, but most of the members of the patron classes I know are fairly damn well educated. So, if you're proposing to educate these elaborately and expensively educated citizens, I think what you really mean is that you're proposing to reeducate them—to raise their consciousness. Well, I don't know that they need to be raised, or, if they do, if that's the curator's job. I know that many of you work for the great museums of this nation, but I would remind you that these great museums were not founded by museum directors. They were not founded by curators. They were not even founded by directors of education programs. They were founded and built by purportedly "uneducated" members of the patron classes. They bought the art. They got bored with having it in their house, so they built the buildings and shared it with their fellow citizens. That's not a bad thing.

I grew up in a town—Fort Worth, Texas—that was the beneficiary of a genuinely enlightened, if not altogether housebroken, patron class. They were all thieves, perhaps, but they stole very good things. The Kimbells and the Carters, the Cantys and the Hudsons, all of these people bought great stuff and shared it with me. When the Kimbells began collecting and started to go to Europe, as was their wont, after years and years of looking at cattle and groceries, La Kimbell fell in love with eighteenth-century British painting. She brought home a Romney. She brought home a Gainsborough. She brought home a Reynolds. She brought home a lot of pictures, and she hung them in her house for a while, then decided that that wasn't enough. So, she took down about four of those pictures and hung them in a little room in the upstairs section of the Fort Worth Public Library, where I saw them. Not only that, she would hang around there so she would have people to talk to about them. I talked to her for a whole hour one day. I was a kid. I didn't know who I was talking to. There was this lady who wanted to talk about the paintings. That, I think, is the real character of patronage, and it is not a bad thing. Moreover, I would suggest to you that patrons who share their joys and their enthusiasms with their fellow citizens create a very

different and much healthier communal atmosphere than that created by jumped-up educators dedicated to redeeming the virtue and improving the general habits of the lower orders. Educating the masses is a governmental function, perhaps, but is not the function of patronage. So, I would suggest to you, again, that the whole idea of regarding the people who care about art, however imperfectly, who talk about art, in whatever vernacular terms, as your natural enemies is nothing but prissy, professional prejudice. Your real natural enemies are working down at Pep Boys; they are out in the country forming militias. Trust me on that.

Also, I heard a good deal of talk yesterday about avoiding conflicts of interest, and it would seem, from the tenor of the discussion, that one avoids conflict of interest by usurping the role of patron in the name of “professional” judgment. In other words, as long as a “professional” is commissioning the work or selecting the work to be bought, there is no conflict of interest. If a trustee says, why don’t you buy this Gainsborough, and you say, oh no, we have our eye on a little David Salle, that somehow redeems the conflict of interest. If, rather than having one of your trustees commission a work for a public park, you yourself commission a work for a big, empty warehouse that the museum has just taken over in its never-ending territorial ambitions, that redeems conflict of interest. What I would suggest to you is that the discourse of art in this particular culture is *about* conflict of interest (see James Madison in *Federalist #10*). That is its subject—the conflict between monetary interest and social interest, between monetary power and aesthetic power, between civic virtue and civic grandeur. We trade them back and forth all the time. How much monetary power do we trade for this much aesthetic power? What objects do we like better than money, better than power? How does one resolve the conflict of interest between one’s role as a civil servant and one’s role as a serious devotee of visible culture? This is not a conflict that is going to go away. Nor is the conflict between the power of money and the power of art. These conflicts are what you’re hired to negotiate with civilized integrity. There can be no disinterest. We all know there is no disinterested position. What are you supposed to do? Stand back and sort of casually intuit what people will love?—what will make them better? That’s not a doable job. We’re dealing here with a situation whose content is conflicting interests, so, perhaps, it would help to simply acknowledge that and to stop being unctuous about it. It’s a real world out there.

Further, I would suggest to you that a public institution devoted to the visible arts need do no more. It needn’t serve everyone nor do everything. The fact that you don’t have Lamaze classes, midnight basketball, or macramé seminars at your museum is not per se a bad thing. It’s okay if you care about the visual arts. It’s okay if you advocate the realm of the visible. You are a public institution, but you’re a public institution of visible art.

One of the peculiar subtexts that ran through all of our discussions yesterday, however, was the presumption that it's better to get bigger. This is a reflexive institutional pathology. American institutions are, basically, the product of an agrarian culture. They are about controlling territory, and the more territory you control, physically and culturally, the more power you perceive yourself as having. Economies of scale are not the same as the economies of size, however, and I would suggest to you that small is okay. Small is always okay. In a puritan republic like this one, where there is small interest in the visible arts, it's perfectly rational. It's like, are we going to expand the Frick? You know, Jesus, guys! I would suggest further that the instinct to expand is one of the ways in which the people who run institutions unconsciously mimic the moral habits of their business supporters. In corporate culture, economies of scale and size are really equivalent, but this does not necessarily translate into institutional culture. A little-bitty good thing is really okay. Intensity trumps volume in the realm of art, and a little-bitty good thing that privileges those citizens who would otherwise have no access to the objects and accoutrements of visible culture is not a bad thing. It is something to be proud of, and it is cherished wherever it exists—in the Frick, in the Menil, and in any number of other institutions. You don't have to get bigger; you are supposed to get better. If art were as popular as you people presume that it should be, there would be no need for public art institutions. The commercial sector would intervene and make money out of that popularity. So, let me ask you this—if most people in America don't like art, and museums keep changing until they discover something that most people like, will that be art? Do you understand what I'm saying?

That's why museum expansions never work quite as well as they should. First, they exploit the baser motives of the local support community, since most of the guys and gals on museum boards build buildings, they don't make art. If they can build a building, they're happy. If they can sell some plumbing fixtures, they're happy. If they can tear down the neighborhood where unpopular artists have studios and build a white block by some Connecticut architect, they're really happy. And if the local viewing audience can come to the museum to see movies and play basketball, they're happy, too. And if they're happy, their elected representatives, who fund your institution, are happy as well. That doesn't necessarily mean that it should be done, and I think it's the responsibility of some people in authority in the arts to say, Stop it! Small is okay!

It also helps to remember that art is fast and cheap, while architecture is slow and expensive—that art is always most at home when it is most out of place. Art always looks best in the architecture of the previous period, and architecture always tries to accommodate to art and dominate it. Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko's paintings looked great in those tiny West Village apartments where I

first saw them. Then, modern architects built vast halls designed to reduce them to postage stamps. Now, reduced in scale, they have lost their size and presence. Then, artists who show in these spaces react against the preemptive architecture and make even larger works, so, in recent years, we have opened up three or four major museums filled with giant spaces that are going to be very useful if Anselm Kiefer clones himself and continues to produce for the next century.

I was in a museum in Chicago the day after it opened. I looked at those spaces and I thought, how nice; the normative product of an artist under twenty-five right now is a foot-square painting. It's going to look great in here. My point is that there is a necessary time lag between art and architecture and a necessarily aggressive relationship between them, deriving from the iconophobia of modern architecture in this century. As a consequence of art's fluidity and architecture's ideology, then, the task of creating a useful, lasting contemporary art museum is, almost by definition, impossible. Better to worry about the art.

There is another related issue I would like to raise. I heard a good deal of talk yesterday about interdisciplinarity. The term, however, was never used to describe people or practices or objects that manifest skills and learning in two or more disciplines. It was, invariably, used as a code word for *antidisciplinarity*, and antidisciplinarity describes the practice of subsuming all endeavors under some totalizing religious, civic, scientific, sociological, or political discourse. Disciplines, I would remind you, were originally *invented* in the late Middle Ages to evade the antidisciplinarity of Christian thought. In the late twentieth century, antidisciplinarity has returned under the woozy haze of Frankfurt School sociology and Freudian psychology, which subsume all they touch. Interdisciplinarity is a very different thing. It refers to individuals or groups or objects or practices that manifest multiple disciplines. Antidisciplinarity is what we do today—we presume that the personal is political, that the aesthetic is economic, that the sciences are social, and that everything is psychological. The presumption that art does not exist as a distinct category of experience, however, is demonstrably wrong. If it did not exist, we could not distinguish between the noise of a sonata and the noise of a vacuum cleaner, and I, for one, can do that every time. I can even expand my artistic category of response and listen to the vacuum cleaner as if it were music, but I cannot, in good faith, admit to being able to listen to a sonata as extra-artistic cultural noise. Q.E.D.

At this point, I would like to comment on two other trends that were discussed yesterday in general tones of approbation: the promise of technology and the coming hegemony of time-based art. To begin, I think that you have to acknowledge, as participants in a contemporary museum culture, that if art is fast and architecture is slow, institutions are even slower. If you work in an institution, you're dealing with increments of change that are exquisite in their tininess, and,

as a consequence, you can't really keep up with secular culture without impeding the rate of change you aspire to reflect. An instance: I heard some talk yesterday about the embrace of digital technology by museums and universities. From a fund-raising perspective, this is a positive move, because the people on the boards of museums and universities hate employees and love hardware, so if we can expand through hardware (which my brother-in-law, by the way, can get you a very good deal on), this is good, I suppose. If this obsession with hardware leads to an obsession with digital hardware art, it is somewhat less positive. In fact, if contemporary museum culture wishes to create a situation that privileges change, it might do well to consider the real relationship of art and technology in the history of the West.

The problem, as George Bernard Shaw remarked about the vogue of Richard Wagner, is that “when everybody says something is the next big thing, it is not the next big thing. It is the last of the previous big thing.” Now, any of you who know the history of music know Shaw was accurate to the point of prophecy about Wagner. In other words, Wagner was the last of that and not the first of something that came after it. The same might be said of James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Jackson Pollock, and many other dominant figures who were perceived to be the next big thing and were, in fact, the end of the last big thing. So, let me suggest to you, apropos of this, that the relationship of art and technology is simultaneously dialectical and prescient—that art and technology oppose and predict one another.

To begin, there are two dominant modes of art-technology interaction. There's an art-technology interface that deals with issues of incarnation and one that deals with issues of representation. The tradition of incarnation begins with bronze casting, and goes up through oil glazing, suspended pigment, plastics, color film, acrylic paint, etc. Then, there is a tradition that deals specifically with issues of representation, that stretches from the technologies of perspective to the printing press, to engraving, color printing, and, ultimately, to digital representation. The relationship between art and technology, however, has never been one-to-one. Quite the contrary: Art, at any particular moment, is always giving us back what the dominant technology is taking away.

As a consequence, I would suggest to anyone in the art world who is beguiled by digital culture that what you really like is getting eighties' text-photo art really quickly on your home computer. Websites *are* eighties' photo-text art. I saw a website the other day that mimics a Bernar Venet installation that I saw, in Soho, in 1968. This relationship is dialectical and prescient. We spent thirty years getting ready for the web—standing there reading shit, looking at Xerox photos on the wall. Right? Now, we can do this at home. But this ain't cutting edge, guys. This wave is on the beach. Again, keeping in mind my reservations about

art museums trying to be trendy, I think that if you do want to privilege the future, you can do better than embrace the popularized expression of the same crap you've been exhibiting for twenty-five years. I cite the authority of my students on this, the best of whom insist that "computers are corny. I've been doing Adobe since I was in eighth grade."

This, I think, is a reasonable position. My students understand that digital technology has reached the point where it is taking things away from us: the haptic, the tactile, the fractal, and the chromatic. You don't have to go very far to see art beginning to give these qualities back to us. So, let me be clear: There is no particular reason that museums should be au courant and respond to this response, but there is also no particular reason that they should oppose this perfectly rational tendency. The whole history of conceptual art begins by giving us back what the sixties' technologies of incarnation, of plastics and color film and projection, were taking away from us. Consequently, in the late sixties, we got the concept. Now, we have, perhaps, a surfeit of concept and artists giving us back the other thing. This is perfectly normal. So, I think that institutions, even though they are not obligated to be trendy, are obligated not to be professionally and aggressively reactionary in this regard.

This brings me to another important issue: the growing hegemony of time-based arts in American museums. I, personally, regard it as arrogant pandering to vulgar taste—the last dying wheeze of lumpen representation. So, let me make a small, theoretical digression here and remind you that the primary critical question we ask about time-based art is the exact reverse of the first question we ask about object art. When you listen to a sonata, the parts are all available to us one at a time. There is this part, there is that part, there is this part, there is that part, the end. The issue with a sonata, the idea we must construe, is the idea of the whole. What's a sonata? If anybody here knows, tell me later, because I don't know anybody who does know, but that is the critical issue. How do we characterize the whole? In object art, the issue is exactly the opposite. We see the whole and we argue about what constitutes the parts, and the ideological drift of our subsequent critique is absolutely dependent on how we construe these parts. If we look at a Raphael and say, oh, the parts are the Virgin and the Child, which express the iconography of the incarnate word to be used as an aid to devotion, our thought goes in that direction. If, on the other hand, we construe the humanist parts and generalize, saying, oh not the Virgin and the Christ but a mother and child engaged in a warm human relationship, and look how Raphael invests the little baby with individuality, you have another discourse. If, however, you say, please observe the color wheel and the triangulation of the structure as they relate to the edges of the painting and relate back to the history of Greek pictorial organization and look forward to Hans Hoffman, you have something

else. And then, of course, you notice the manifestations of early capitalist culture as they embody themselves in the ring, in the garment, and you also note the signifier of Oriental alterity as that manifests itself in the embroidery. My point: Object art depends on our imagination of the parts. Thus, object art depends absolutely on our repertoire of experience of other object art to determine these parts. The designation of parts is the first determination we make about objects, and it is absolutely dependent upon our prior experience of other objects.

To contrast this with our experience of time-based arts, I could take any number of you, presuming that you're in a condition of perfect innocence, and give you a CD of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and, even if you've never even heard Oasis, you could take it home, play it four or five times, and learn to appreciate it, because you could internalize the tonality, you could internalize the pace and sequence. You could understand the second movement in terms of the first movement, the third movement in terms of the first and second. When you got to the end, your experience would be based on that which comes before. What this means is that time-based art privileges the ignorant. It is perfectly perceptible within its own stochastic relationships. Therefore, it brings with it the benison most dearly beloved by commercial culture—instant gratification. I saw the first of the video; therefore, I understand the last of the video. Object art is something very different, because I can give you Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and yet, even though Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is a lot more complicated than a Jasper John's *Target*, I could not give you Jasper John's *Target* and have you take it home and gradually come to terms with it, if you haven't seen any more paintings. Because the paintings that come before Jasper's *Target*, in your experience, constitute its first movement. The paintings that come after constitute the third movement. The perception of object art is a serial, experiential, and accumulative experience. You gotta see a lot of it. You gotta not understand a lot of it. You gotta worry about a lot of it. You gotta understand the first in terms of the second and the second in terms of the first. This is not a crowd-pleaser without sufficient narrative. So, what I see more and more in museums is the imposition of totally artificial narratives upon objects through the use of text and video—also, the gradual substitution of time-based video for objects that require a repertoire of precedent responses.

Now, I really like video—some. But I also see it being exploited as the museum, in its quest for popularity, becomes more and more a cineplex. I see it as one of the ways the market-driven museum seeks to exploit and privilege the ignorant for dollars at the door. So I think that this is a real consideration, but to take this into consideration, you've got to be willing not to be too popular. You know? If you put up objects, you may not be the most popular girl. You can't go to the city council meeting, and say, well, little Darryl is learning about habitats

of the Hopi when he looks at this Marsden Hartley. There are people who say things like that. I'm not kidding you. Give it some thought. Give some consideration to the real function that the shift from object-based to time-based idioms has in the museum. Also, ask yourselves how much you like watching movies standing up. Speaking for myself, I like it about as much as I like reading standing up, which is another one of my least favorite things. These issues—antidisciplinarity under the guise of interdisciplinarity, the disingenuous embrace of digital technology, and the growing hegemony of time-based art—are concerns that museums need to address. They all derive directly from the effort to make the museum more market-driven than Mary Boone. Actually, I have an idea for Rob [Storr] in this area, for the perfect Museum of Modern Art show: Picasso paintings of the Holy Land from the collection of Jacqueline Onassis. If that don't fetch 'em, I don't know Arkansas.

In any case, I think it might help to be preternaturally self-conscious about the commercial aspirations of museums, because I suspect that most of them are driven more by territorial ambitions and regional competition than by the need for funding. Things have become extremely distorted here, so we should never dismiss the possibility that societies of northern European Protestant extraction don't like visible art and can't afford it. Or, rather, that they can only afford anti-materialistic, puritanical, iconoclastic, therapeutic art that reinforces the values of the governing classes. This might just be the fact. If it is the fact, however, that doesn't mean that the museum of art, as a combination temple and forum for the adjudication of value, for the creation of new meanings, is not viable. It just means that the site can't be quite so grand and full of virtue.

Also, in this regard, I think we should free ourselves from the delusion that we are creating the art world. I do not think, based on my long experience, that this is the case. I think art creates the art world. I think certain kinds of art predict and necessitate a certain kind of art world. Pop art could not create the art world we know. We live in an art world now that is created by the academic proclivities and governmental ambitions of postminimalist practice, which, as my wife would say, is *so over!* The issue today is, how do we keep the art world, created and permanently institutionalized by yesterday's art, from retarding changes that cannot be suppressed? How do we facilitate our own obsolescence, in other words? A certain amount of foot-dragging is inevitable, of course. That's one of the functions of all institutional culture. It is irrevocably conservative. All institutions are conservative, dealers are conservative, curators and critics are conservative. We all want artists to want what we want them to do to facilitate our practice. This can be fairly confusing when the conservative instinct of the art establishment is to keep art revolutionary, but it's still a conservative instinct. "I just want to go back to the barricades in '68." They ain't there anymore, kids. We

live in quite a different world.

Now, by way of conclusion, I would like to raise a couple of issues with the imposition of civic mandates on aesthetic fiction. I find it extremely nervous-making, for instance, when terms like “research” and “laboratory” are used in the vicinity of art. They imply scientific, educational, and liberal-arts ambitions to which the culture aspires, to which works of art do not aspire and cannot fulfill. As Rob [Storr] said the other day, art is a propositional discourse. It has no truth-value; it cannot be proven. Therefore, one cannot be educated by art, because art bears with it no knowledge. It entails a relational, experiential adaptation to a disorienting experience. Art that confirms our knowledge is invisible. Art that subverts our knowledge ain’t knowledge. I can teach you some things. I can impart to you knowledge about art history. I can impart to you knowledge about art practice. Art doesn’t teach us anything. It doesn’t teach us anything about art. It doesn’t teach us anything about life. If it did, we would all be redeemed human beings. Our long experience with art would have so bettered us that we would barely touch the floor. Now, rock and roll *does* make you better, but art, sadly, is a propositional discourse. It exists in what Karl Popper would call an environment of confirmation or refutation. It is either accepted, rejected, or revised. It is an externalized discourse of value. It is demonstrably an axiological practice and not a pedagogical one.

Now, I understand perfectly that you can’t raise a dime for art without saying it’s education. But don’t believe it. We’re talking about an experiential discourse here. Even those conceptual-art discourses that aspire to pure concept are, in fact, local to their context. And this is not a philosophical objection on my part, it is a practical observation that the act of explaining art is based on the presumption that art has, somewhere in it, some determinate meaning. In fact, works of art have no determinate meanings. No work of art has a determinate meaning. If works of art *had* determinate meanings, sometime in the last five hundred years we should almost certainly have figured out what at least one work of art *means*. When we try to impose meanings on works of art with wall texts, catalogs, docents, and acousti-guides (I don’t know which one annoys me more), what we are really doing is suppressing the possibility of new meaning—and art that is unreceptive to new meaning does not survive. Art that survives must survive its original attributions of meaning. That’s just the fact. You can’t stop spring from arriving. You can only kill the flower when it does.

How would you like to spend your days talking to students, trying to explain to them that Jackson Pollock’s paintings are theaters of Jungian redemption? Jackson was vaguely under that impression. What do you do today? You say, Well, now, Jackson Pollock may be regarded as the father of performance art. And that may be so. But that means we’ve cranked up Jackson’s paintings and run a

whole new ideology under them so we can keep Jackson's paintings, not because they're good but because we like them. These new meanings are the consequence of having people come into the environment with the work of art and freaking winging it. That's what it's about, in my view, because one of those people might present a proposition that saves Matisse for us. I don't think John Elderfield is going to do it. But somebody is going to. This perpetual ritual of reallegorization that takes place on the site of the museum is a sublimated version of the larger discourse of value that motivates nearly all commercial cultures, which conduct their valuing in terms of externalized correlatives.

What I'm proposing here, without wishing to fetter the winged stud of your curatorial muse, is a little attention to detail, a little attention to the hard copy of the visible object, an aspiration to put up a room full of disparate works of art that make your thesis self-evident, with no text and no acousti-guide. Having done this, we can all hope that some kid will come in and say, oh, yeah, I know what this is about, and tell you something you've never freaking heard of. That, it seems to me, is the joy of the whole project. Art first, meaning second, new meaning tomorrow. As curators, you have the possibility of doing that. You can create the condition for new meaning and new pleasure and new value, and that, it seems to me, overrides any issues of scale and virtue, because it is out of that particular discourse that the world lives, today and tomorrow.

AUDIENCE QUESTION AND ANSWER

Peter Plagens: A small, perhaps not small, practical question: What would you do, or advise, if you were a curator and in the position that you describe yourself as being in, not liking enough art, not liking enough artists, to go on after the third show? Say you have a job—you're going to come up with shows for the next five years. What do you do other than say, We're going to turn off the lights?

Dave Hickey: This is a real problem. I started off as an art dealer, and I thought that was like being a curator, but I suddenly realized that, during one year, I could show the ten artists I loved—then, the next year, I could show them again. If you're a curator, you show the ten artists you love, and, after that, you find yourself in a meeting in which someone says, We haven't shown an Iraqi minimalist in five years. And, all of a sudden, you're not doing what you know and love. You're doing stuff for other people's good, and all of your accumulated experience, all of your embodied judgment, disappears. You're suddenly dealing in a realm in which you have no physical repertoire of responses, only the presumption of your cultural clairvoyance. I think you quit. I've quit a few jobs. You do the thing that the girls in Jane Austen couldn't do. You move to L.A. You get a job at a Starbucks. You hang out in rock clubs. I don't know what you do. But the years of sustained employment in the same job are over, I think. And I'm not making light of this. I don't think it's a small thing.

I'll give you a curatorial project that I think needs to be done. Back in the eighties, when David Salle was the thing, there was no one over the age of twelve that did not recognize the powerful influence of Picabia on this work. The institutions that owned all the Picabias did not deign to exhibit those Picabias, although such an exhibition would have, in fact, provided a rich environment in which David and a number of his colleagues could have shown. It would have given them some historical confirmation and made them a little less boring. No curator did that. Mary Boone did the damn Picabia show. I think this is a perfect emblem of the historical irresponsibility of contemporary museums.

I have been arguing for years, for instance, for a Bradley Walker Tomlin show. He's a modern artist, and if you look at postwar American practice and want to find the pivotal figure in the development of synthetic abstract painting, out of which David Reed, Jonathan Lasker, or even your own paintings, Peter, might be said to evolve, you look to Tomlin. The existence of this new painting rewrites art history, making Tomlin a more interesting figure than he was before. Curators

have an historical mandate to document the perpetual reconstruction of art history as it is revised by contemporary practice. That's a reasonable project, and I think that it's irresponsible not to do.

C.M.: Charles Moleski: I'm from the Fairmount Park Art Association.

D.H.: Daniel Heyman: Where's that?

C.M.: Charles Moleski: Here, in Philadelphia.

D.H.: Daniel Heyman: Okay.

C.M.: Charles Moleski: I'd like to first confess that I'm not a curator.

D.H.: Daniel Heyman: Okay.

C.M.: Charles Moleski: I wanted to ask about your comments on technology. I was recently at the Experience Music Project, in Seattle, which is a beautiful building.

D.H.: Daniel Heyman: Yes, it is.

C.M.: Charles Moleski: But the technological gizmos render the experience a disaster. How do you resist technology without seeming like a Luddite?

D.H.: Daniel Heyman: First of all, don't be a dummy. You presume that most citizens of this country, unlike most technonerd, are not control freaks. Most museum display-technology these days aspires to interactivity, which is the last thing you want in art. You want to be out of control. Do you understand? You want, in an isolated situation, to give up control and respond freely. You don't take the brown acid and then punch the rollback button. Do you understand? That's sissy. What I'm saying is, the museum is, specifically, a safe atmosphere in which one may divest oneself of one's obsessive Protestant self-consciousness and self-control, where one may, for just a moment, not impose your bloody whims on everything. You can just let it go. Just let Mr. Rothko do what he can do. It wasn't much, but it was better than nothing. Do you understand? I'm saying I think that the presumption that we're supposed to empower people by investing them with controls and panic buttons, so they can change the story if it seems not to be going well, is uncivilized. Don't like the fifth act of *Hamlet*? Here's one where everything turns out all right! The whole idea is to participate in a stochastic sequence of events and not know what's going to happen. Now, technology can do that; it doesn't because

people that do technology are very insecure and not very cool. Their job is to control things. We have to be aware that we ain't in the interactive business or the education business. The contemporary art museum doesn't really need a dinosaur where you push a button and it tells you about the late Triassic. That is not what art does. It is, however, what people who run museums want, because, as I said, they hate people, they love hardware. Hardware doesn't ask for benefits. Or strike, Rob.

Let me also modify my remarks about my students and technology. I think, to a certain extent, a digital culture has, in fact, made my teaching of art a lot easier; kids that have been on Photoshop since they were in eighth grade are more visually sophisticated than the previous generations. But they are so sophisticated, they know how dopey Iris prints are. In other words, they have, mostly, by the time they are in college, evolved beyond the fact that you can go on your computer and make a picture of Hillary Clinton making love to an alien. They have moved on. So, there is an enormous benison in digital cultures. They have made kids smarter in the realm of the visible, but the kids are smart enough to know that what you want is haptic-tactile-fractal.

Paul Schimmel: Given your long involvement with the music world and your stated interest in some video art, what place do you see for time-based art within the museum structure, if at all?

D.H.: I've genuinely had a lot of interest over the years in performance and video. It is my suspicion, however, that all of the good video art was done before there was such a thing as video art—when it was just stuff that Bruce [Nauman] and Bill [Wegman] were doing in their studios, because they sold a painting and got a fancy camera. That was a lot more fun. The institutionalization of “other media”—I don’t know what you call it—has not been of any help at all. It just imposes old modernist media categories. I do think that most works of performance and video art are on their way to a genre. You know, Laurie [Anderson] was always on the way to rock and roll; Spalding Gray was always on the way to stand-up comedy. Most video is always on the way to Benny Hill, you know? Those are the standards by which we judge. But here, again, I think that the development of video art has not been allowed to blossom under the hegemony of late-seventies postminimalist aesthetics. It is beginning to change. Again, I have no natural reservation about it, beyond those I have expressed here, and, as a critic, I never attack art tendencies I hate, because that only makes kids like it more. Also, no tendency is so degraded it cannot be redeemed by talent and courage, so *vive la performance!* There remains, however, the problem that video dematerializes. There is also the problem that video has about one-tenth the information of a comparable object, and the residual hunger for physical information, with

which electronic culture invariably leaves us, makes video so unsatisfying. It also wastes my time: It takes me about forty seconds to see ten paintings that I want to look at for the rest of my life; it takes me forty minutes to see a video I never want to see again. Maybe it's an old-guy thing. You know? I mean, I used to sit around and listen to Flock of Seagulls albums. I do think that the darker side of time-based art is that it is available to anybody who just stands there, and that's not elitist enough for me, not refined enough. It's got to be better than TV.

Yes. This is Judith.

Judith Tannenbaum: It's me. I'm at the RISD Museum now; formerly of the ICA here. I was interested in what you were saying about architecture being behind art.

D.H.: Right.

J.T.: Do you have any advice about how to plan for building for the future? If that's the case. Which is really an interesting problem.

D.H.: To be honest, I think contemporary architecture is totally unredeemable. I dabbled in the world of architecture schools for about five years, and I finally just threw up my hands. We've established such a profound seminary attitude that you don't even meet weird people in the architecture school anymore. I mistake them for seminarians. They want to do good, and do-gooders don't do good art or architecture, so I don't know. I have no idea. But all I know is that I did a little survey of most of my friends and asked them where would they rather look at art. Ten or fifteen, two-thirds of them, said they would rather look at art at the Prado, which is a big, dumb, square building full of great art. That's not a bad idea. The first time I went into the Prado a dog came in with me. A pooh. He just wandered around with me. Whoah, Velázquez, woof!

This might be a good moment to sever art from the current pathologies of contemporary architecture. They will wither soon enough; they will suddenly fall away, and, soon, it will be possible to have a congenial space to look at art—and, in truth, I have been in some congenial spaces. I think Piano's space at the Menil is a lovely space, if you don't mind the image of ghostly nuns swishing down those halls. It's kind of like the world's fanciest convent. I'm not saying you can't do successful museums, just that you always have to keep in mind that art really does change and not only does it change, it usually changes to subvert the dictates of architecture, so museum buildings are almost, by definition, out of date. I think, assuming this sort of dynamic relationship between art and architecture, you need a civilized architect. If you meet one, have him call me.

That was unfair; you get the idea.

Michael Komanecky: I'm chief curator at the Phoenix Art Museum. I have to show my hand: I'm not a curator of contemporary art, I'm here because of my interest in discussions about what curators do in museums today. Yesterday, I walked away from much of the session with an uncomfortable feeling about what I would call the "yes, but" syndrome. Curators are encouraged to be creative, to show the art that they are passionate about—but we have to consider marketing, but we have to consider education, but we have to consider audience. And I fail to see, yet, any earnest discussion about resolving what, to me, is an essential conflict there. If you really want people to do the things that they are committed about, how does that happen in the museum today?

D.H.: Well, I honestly think that that isn't what people really want curators to do. You know? I'm a magazine writer. My job is to keep the ads apart. I know that. There's got to be a little column of text there so that the Dewars' ad doesn't segue into the brassiere ad—I mean, that's what I do. There is a level at which curators are supposed to keep the walls filled. Not only that, the walls must be filled forever. It's not like the staff at the Whitney is going to get up one morning and say, Jesus, there's nothing around that's any good; let's just close this sucker for a month—no more than *Arforum*'s Jack Bankowsky is going to look around and say, Gee, all this stuff sucks; let's don't publish in April.

If we were dealing with real businesses, this would happen. The great thing about bad art dealers is that they go out of business. The darker part of great institutions is that they just go on and on. The checks are coming in. The system is rolling. The education department is mobilizing its new projects. So, I don't think cynicism is a bad position. You do the best you can. And it's not any different anywhere. I just did what was going to be a six-page piece about Dan Flavin in *Vanity Fair*. It was cut down to four hundred words because they got some new Gwyneth Paltrow pictures. Great photos of Gwynie, though.

Most of the rhetoric we hear about freedom and creativity is part of what we call the discourse of accommodation. All large bureaucratic cultures have an entrenched discourse of complaining about bureaucracy, and that is part of the accommodation to living with assholes, as we all do. I teach at a university. We call it a university; it's a handicapped parking zone. It won't change, so we complain. We should, then, take this discourse of complaint as an icon of our aspirations and presume that it, like art, has no truth value whatsoever.

I think it's possible to do little-bitty things. In college, we used to say that one person can make a difference—and it's usually a bad person. But one good person can make a difference, although that difference cannot be sustained in the absence of that person. In other words, institutions, for all their pretensions, are organizations of people, and one person can make a difference at enormous cost

to themselves. That doesn't mean it's not worth doing. I mean give up show biz?

Dean Daderko: I had a couple questions and, first, some observations. It seems that the institutional model is the one that we're talking about here.

D.H.: Yes.

D.D.: In terms of curatorial work. So, I address it specifically to that and, kind of, to all of us here. My observations are that it seems that in yesterday's session the voice of dissent was represented really by members of the press. Their questions and comments and criticisms touched some obviously really tender spots and got the most inflammatory reactions. The criticism also felt, to me at least, like it came from an outside position, one outside of the curatorial system. I felt there was this need to defend some place. So, the questions that I have are, how can we make curatorial practice somehow more porous, less about a kind of outside and an inside? Can the dialogue of criticism become somehow integral and internal? And is it the function of one type of criticism, in practice, to be reactionary, like a litmus test is?

D.H.: Right.

D.D.: Or can these situations that we're critiquing exist outside of that? Also, how we, as curators, can create dissent from within our practice and problematize the practice, kind of like a micro coup d'état or something.

I'm going on a little bit. Who is this audience we're talking with or talking to, more importantly? Can audiences at the same institutions differ in number of members or in focus—meaning, can an audience at an institution be four people or does it need to be three hundred or a thousand people? What are the implications of that in terms of fragmenting the institution? Then, the last part is, I imagine, when I'm doing curatorial work, I have a kind of audience in mind, and that audience is usually quite a small one, in terms of who I'm thinking about and addressing.

D.H.: Right.

D.D.: So, I wonder what everyone thinks are the ethical issues of presenting an exhibition that's made for an imagined audience, say of four or five people, to an actual audience of hundreds or thousands of people. Do we need to radicalize and be able to actually say that the institution can do an exhibition for four or five people and, in those terms, can we extend that to say that because an exhibition, because of its necessities for length, the time it takes to arrange, etc., we're

still kind of organizing it on a one-month or three-month basis. Do we need to be able to say that some of the exhibitions need to take six months in the institution? Others go for a month. Things like that. Those are just some questions.

D.H.: Well, Dean, about the microrevolution from within, get real! No, I don't think that that will happen. I have always held that museums are like yachts: If you have to ask how much they cost, you can't afford them. So, let's grow up. People don't like art. Let's get smaller places with better art. When I first lived in New York as a kid, I used to go to the Met every day. I'd go three or four days in a row and see four people. That was so great, because it isolated me from my community—my favorite thing. But an empty museum is anathema now. In a sense, the museum is there for unfashionable things, because we trust commerce to take care of those fashionable things. If the museum wants to piggyback on the whims of *Spin* magazine, that's their business. But, in a sense, the museum is there to be unfashionable, and by being unfashionable it's going to lose attendance. I think, of course, you do it for four people.

The issue of guest curators, however, is a more complex issue than you think: There are a whole lot of resident curators who are eager to establish the respectability of the profession and the role of the curator as an established position within the museum hierarchy. Even though the idea of having guest curators could reinvigorate the discourse, that doesn't mean resident curators are going to be in favor of it. You understand? Because there are very good institutional reasons for them not to be in favor of it. I've been a guest curator and a guest professor, and it's one of those "glad to see you come, glad to see you go" deals. But that's okay. It would be great if every show was guest-curated, but, then, who would do the research and who would count and stack and tell you how many centimeters it is? I think that's important. We are in the "thing" business and I don't see any alternative to it, beyond a fairly rigorous sense of ethics and hard work and not expecting a hug for it. A lot of the problem today derives from this enormous yearning for notoriety, which is the bane of our civilization. I don't understand it, and I think we just might grow up.



Amy Schlegel: I'm the curator of the Philadelphia Art Alliance, which is a contemporary art center in an historic home built in 1906, the place that I want to invite you to afterwards, on Rittenhouse Square. You might like it. It's 2,500 square feet spread out over three floors.

D.H.: I like anything that's older than me.

A.S.: It's small. We have the problem that people come—great location—for the restaurant, a four-star restaurant, on our first floor. How do I get them to venture throughout the building without resorting to a massive marketing effort?

D.H.: I wouldn't bother. You all go to the Approach, in London? It's one of my favorite galleries. It's above a pub—soccer downstairs and art upstairs. I think, if you're patient, you'll develop a constituency. Certainly, the Approach has, and it ain't the lads downstairs high-fiving one another, but if you want to go downstairs, you can. I would just make it clear, make it visible. I don't know if marketing is ever the solution for art. I see them as radically distinct activities. It's okay if it's not a big deal. I really think it's okay. I think the underground is okay. It's okay if nobody knows who we are. I mean, how does that hurt us? I mean, we're doing this thing.

I grew up in the jazz world. If I knew where Miles Davis was playing, I didn't want anybody else to know. Come on! It's okay. It's *cosa nostra*; it's our thing. No reason you need a bunch of farmers tracking up your museum. I'm being dead serious. Art, at present, has about as many devotees as bebop did. Bebop was never very famous; it was never very popular. It had profound and continuing cultural ramifications. You don't need marketing and a development director to do things that have profound cultural consequences—you should keep your eye on the sparrow. The idea is to win in a long-term cultural sense, although I really do sympathize with you.

As an aside, let me suggest one thing to all of you who are involved in kunsthalle curating: It is one of the most economically determined practices in the history of art. I remember back in the late sixties with the birth of what we call installation art or nonobject art, this whole category of Postminimalism, which starts with Bruce Nauman, Bob Smithson, Eve Hesse, and Richard Serra, all of these people. Until 1972, this was all perfectly viable commercial art. It was bought and sold. Even Joe Kosuth. And it's still commercial art. Even if it's not an object. Even if it's a Doug Heubler you put in a drawer. It was commercial art. In 1972, with the proliferation of kunsthalles across this nation, it suddenly became official noncommercial art for specific economic reasons.

You're running an NEA-funded kunsthalle in Madison, Wisconsin. You and your friends are sitting around sorting seeds and stems in a storefront on some snowy street. You got a few bucks from the state, much the way Stalin used to send money to Siberia. You're out there, it's snowy outside, you're stoned, you want to have a show. One of your idiot friends says, well, man, let's get some of those cool Roy Lichtenstein paintings. This discussion follows. Well, we can't have paintings because (1) we can't afford to ship them, (2) our storefront has no climate control and they would warp and dissolve, (3) we have no security to

protect them, (4) we have no place to store the crates, and (5) we have no money for insurance. All we're getting from the state is rent on this freaking storefront, so why don't we raise some money and fly Inga over here from Berlin, let her go to a thrift store, pile up a bunch of garden hoses, and we can have a great party? We can raise money, and we get all the money—the artist will get nothing but the ticket—and we can continue our practice.

Now, kunsthalle culture in this country has run for twenty-five years, driven by these economic necessities. A lot of wonderful and genuinely delightful things were done. I don't mean to critique it. I mean I don't mean to dismiss it. What I do mean to do is emphasize that this aesthetic was the absolute consequence of the economic necessity set up by the NEA kunsthalle program. Also, I would point out that a great many of the people who were slightly younger than myself, who would have, normally, in the everyday flow of things, become art dealers as I did, became alternative space curators, because that option was available. This resulted in a whole absent generation of art dealers and diminution of the authority of the market, while the kunsthalle culture was surviving, to no real end, on seeds and stems. Now that all funding has disappeared, kunsthalle culture is becoming a little more improvisational and self-consciously underground, more mood-enhanced, and this is genuinely a positive consequence. I didn't answer all your questions, Dean. Did I miss a really good one?

Danielle Rice: I hear from you the message that since people don't like art, we should do better stuff on a smaller scale. Is that your message?

D.H.: You can't please people who don't like art. There is no tradition of liking art in this country.

D.R.: Okay. I'd love to hear what the possibilities are for turning people who don't like art into people who like art, through whatever magic of authentic curatorial practice. Do you think that there's a possibility of that?

D.H.: I can assure you that there are absolutely no educational requirements for looking at art. Heidegger is really not required for Mike Kelley, and I'm being dead serious. We could, perhaps, make the world in which art is practiced seem to be a welcoming and civilized place. Everybody could stop wearing black clothing and just wear something nice. But, nah! Actually, I think it might be possible to civilize the society of art a little bit, but the difference between fine and popular art has always been nothing more or less than its exclusivity, so I don't think that's going to happen. Everywhere, people keep asking about educating people about art. What in the hell are you going to teach them? Dirt's

okay? Reacclimate yourself to the discourse of the grotesque—the abject? Whenever somebody says this to me, I try to imagine Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis sitting around saying, we got to educate people to bebop. They wouldn't have ever said that. They were doing what they do. Artists do what they do and people that love art do what they do. It is a volunteer discourse, you know. You can't coerce people in this culture, unless you're an HMO. This is not a totalitarian regime. We're not going to have a new renaissance. Although we can have something really wonderful, if we don't spend all our money on brushed aluminum doorstops. I'm not being flip. I'm being perfectly serious.

Terry Myers: My question is, how do you resist what tends to happen in these situations, where you try to do the kind of things you're doing, where we turn to the sort of status quo and a re-presentation of the usual suspects? How in this activity you're calling for do we get to things that may bring us somewhere else rather than the same place over and over again? My criticism of this is that you often work back to things that we've seen over and over again, in terms of the names that we use when we talk about these things.

D.H.: I guess you show a Bruce Nauman clone. It may be that the art world is a lot bigger than the number of good artists there are to fill it. You have to remember that we live in an extremely literate and expanded ebullient commercial culture, while the percentage of smart, enthusiastic, committed people probably hasn't changed in the population since the Middle Ages. Who is brave? About the same percentage. It may be that the art world is this enormous ocean liner sailing along with three or four guests of honor. Ed Ruscha always says something to me that I take very seriously: "Dave, you have to always remember that whatever is really hot right now, may be really shit. That we may be going through a really bad sandy place. That it's not just you." I think that we all take this into consideration. I certainly test my experience against that possibility. I grew up in a burgeoning art world in Texas that was very much the way Florida is right now, and if there is anything that I can tell you for sure, it's this: It can all go away. All of these things can disappear. If we expect too much of it, it can go away.

There is a beautiful Philip Johnson museum sitting on the Corpus Christi Bay. I went to the opening. Rauschenberg, Stella, Warhol, Serra—great show, great opening. Were you there, Paul? Fun, deep fun at the Bay. The thing is empty now or filled with cowboy paintings, because they just lost interest, closed it down, and moved in the cow paintings. Poof! It can all go away. Some of my critic friends have a pool as to which contemporary art museum will have plywood on the windows first. Paul, you're way up there. But I've got Chicago; I figure I got a winner. But it's an ill wind that blows nobody good.

My point is, when we're selling what we're selling, we have to really be serious about selling *exactly* what we're selling. If we make outsize claims, we're going to look like fools, and less foolish people are going to take our store away from us. I'm really serious. I'm not standing outside here. I'm a part of this. And I think we ought to say, this is what we do; we do it well. It ain't magic. It ain't redeeming. But this is what we do and it's freaking serious and we know more about it than you do, so there! Well, maybe not the "so there" part. I do think it's true that we see the same artists over and over.

For the last thirty years, people have been saying that there's this false canon, that there's no such thing as quality or talented artists. There is a critical agenda expressed by artworkers involved in the progressive collective activity of postminimalist art, but, hey, let's have another Bruce Nauman show, anyway. So why aren't we showing all of the other members of the postminimalist collective? Maybe Bruce is better. Maybe he gives us more. That is a possibility. And it's a possibility that arises when you have an extended monastic bureaucracy of museums with empty spaces that have to be filled. There are many large rooms in this country that must be filled with found objects arranged in a grid every month. Shelves must be mounted. Things in jars must be placed upon them. Everything but pear preserves, which is what should be in those jars. I'm being light here, but I'm not being that light. We might be in a little slough. We might be in a sandy place, you know? It's our job to help that change, but we can't make the art.

