

TOWARD PARTICIPATION IN ART

The performance should make clear to the listener that the hearing of the piece is his own action—that the music, so to speak, is his, rather than the composer's.

—John Cage on 4'33"¹

Who controls the definition of art—the artist, curator, critic, or viewer—is no longer the question. Art is now a contested site defined collectively by all of these actors, each of whom must surrender a measure of authorial control. With the rise of participation, the artistic arena does not merely encompass a broader range of possibilities; rather, these possibilities are being reviewed, acted upon, and changed

even as they are being proposed. This is as much a promise as it is a problem. By entering an artistic situation and actively becoming part of it, the participant can actually be transformed: "I don't know what I will do for the rest of my life. It can't get any better than this!" exclaimed the artist Kiki Smith after having been carried through the streets of Manhattan as a "living icon" in Francis Alÿs's *Modern Procession* (2002; [fig. 7](#)).² For Smith, this might have been the moment implied by the ancient Greek term *kairos*. Whereas *tyche* refers to the active construction of situations in which chance encounters might happen (closely linked to the notion of *techné*, the promise of future technologies and utopian possibilities), *kairos* refers to the passive, unplanned encounter, made possible by a will to let go and enjoy the serendipity of the event. *Kairos* is a moment of rupture and suddenness, suggesting an unexpected presence and an opening of the senses. This naturally can be difficult to achieve in a museum context; it is easier to experience when artists reclaim the streets.



fig. 7

fig. 7
Francis Alys
The Modern Procession,
2002
Performance in New York,
2002 / Courtesy Public
Art Fund, New York

John Cage's *4'33"* (1952; pls. 1–3), Allan Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 16 Parts* (1959), and Nam June Paik's *Random Access* (1963; pls. 24–25) and *Participation TV* (1963; pl. 23) are moments marking a beginning: something happens. This apt definition of the term *happening*, coined by Kaprow, does imply a wish for serendipity. By embracing chance, by giving up control, by inviting others to participate in the production of the artwork, by claiming the radical dismantling of traditional systems for evaluating art, these pioneering figures faced a paradox from the very start: how to do away with art by making art. Art and antiart, and art and life, have always been closely intertwined in this paradox. But for those who do take part, the paradox is precisely the driving force and pleasure principle behind much participatory art. Whatever happens, it will stand out as an *artistic* experience.

From work to process, from performance to performativity, from intent to indeterminacy, this paradigm shift has been furthered by a number of avant-gardes, including Dada, Situationism, and Fluxus. Yet, despite a history of scandals, manifestos, movements, and antimovements, the art world has generally proven derisive of participation (perhaps unsurprisingly, since few marketable objects are actually generated through such dynamics). A number of prominent artists have even voiced an explicit mistrust of or persistent antipathy toward participation—consider, for example, Bruce Nauman's dictum "I mistrust audience participation."³ Is it a prerequisite for art to produce authorial positions even when the artists have based their practice on collaborative or participatory effects? Andy Warhol, the "author" of the first do-it-yourself artworks (see pl. 10), is still considered to be the creator of his work, precisely because the idea of the workshop and the role of the Factory could not be reconciled with an authorial position—a paradox upon which he built his career.

Artists interested in communal processes have experimented with various strategies to relinquish that very position. The desire to invest art with nonart social or political intent—a practice that is lived and not just temporarily experienced—has led some artists to make a fatal decision to step outside the artistic context entirely, moving into educational, activist, or commercial fields. Some have been involuntarily marginalized, while others have simply dropped out, such as the Brazilian Lygia Clark (see pls. 36–42), the Argentinean Marta Minujin (pl. 35), and the recently rediscovered German artist Charlotte Posenenske, whose work was featured at *Documenta 12* in 2007.

1 A John Cage Reader: In Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday, by Peter Gena and Jonathan Brent (New York: C. F. Peters, 1982), 22. 2 Quoted in Francis Alys, *The Modern Procession* (New York: Public Art Fund, 2004), 333. 3 Bruce Nauman (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1994), 77. The closest Nauman ever came to an instructional piece was *Body Pressure* (1974), which he conceived as a series of do-it-yourself actions performed against a wall.



fig. 8

fig. 8
Rirkrit Tiravanija
Untitled (Pad See-ew),
1990/2002
Performance at the
San Francisco Museum
of Modern Art, 2000 /
San Francisco Museum of
Modern Art, gift of Connie
and Jack Tilton

Sehgal can forgo both documenting his artistic situations and creating saleable collateral around them, yet still rise to prominence thanks to uniquely ephemeral performances in the gallery context. But this is a relatively new phenomenon, and it indicates yet another shift. Notions of participatory enactments, of the significance of the presence or trace of the visitor, and of evolving patterns or futile situations have driven recent, highly successful exhibitions by Rudolf Stingel and Rirkrit Tiravanija (see fig. 8). In 2007 a retrospective of Kaprow's ephemeral oeuvre (complete with a series of reenactments) began touring to museums in Europe and the United States. Despite the demise proclaimed by Roland Barthes, we cannot seem to get rid of the author; the harder we try the stronger the myth returns.⁴ Ultimately, if artists wish to operate within the art world, they will inevitably be perceived as the ones responsible for the work, even if they involve collaborators, let others take on the actual production, utilize online networks, or—and this is our specific focus here—court unknown participants.

Although *The Art of Participation* focuses on collaborative practices in general, this essay specifically addresses questions related to what one might call open systems. In media art the term *interactive* has often been criticized for being simply euphemistic: no true interaction is possible when one must select from a predefined set of options. What interests me, rather, is something approaching true interactivity—an opening up to conditions, locations, and participants who contribute actively to the realization of a participatory work.⁵ The sculptor Richard Serra once defined artistic activity by listing a series of

physical actions: to roll, to crease, to fold, to store, etc. The art historian Miwon Kwon later translated Serra's concept to site-specificity: to negotiate, to coordinate, to compromise, to research, to organize, to interview, etc.⁶ Today we might augment these lists with other activities that specifically highlight the participatory act: to generate, to change, to contribute, to enact, to dialogue, to translate, to appropriate, to tag, etc.

In 1969 the artist Douglas Huebler (pl. 63) proposed the idea of a work that could be realized without the direct intervention of the artist:

A system existing in the world disinterested in the purposes of art may be "plugged into" in such a way as to produce a work that possesses a separate existence and that neither changes nor comments on the system as used. . . . An inevitable destiny is set in motion by the specific process selected to form such a work freeing it from further decisions on my part. I like the idea that even as I eat, sleep or play the work is moving towards its completion.⁷

4 See Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (1968), in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977). 5 The Austrian theorist Robert Pfaller coined the seemingly paradoxical term *interpassivity* as a clear critique of reductionist ideas of interactivity. See the essays collected in Pfaller, *Interpassivität: Studien über delegiertes Genießen* (Vienna: Springer, 2000). 6 See Miwon Kwon, "One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity," *October* 80 (Spring 1997): 103. 7 Quoted in *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form; Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information*, by Harald Szeemann (Bern, Switzerland: Kunsthalle Bern, 1969), n.p.

Huebler's notion of a self-generating artwork was one of a number of related ideas that surfaced in the 1960s. In 1962 Umberto Eco introduced the notion of the "open work," and in 1970 the critic and curator Jack Burnham organized an exhibition titled *Software: Information Technology; Its New Meaning for Art* at the Jewish Museum, New York.⁸ Deeply influenced by cybernetics and communication theory, Burnham's project propagated the concept of open systems. Since the introduction of technological systems into the arts, practitioners have voiced suspicion about the manufacturing of community and consent through art. Artists did not want to side with any technology that was spearheading governmental or utilitarian operations. Thus, no genre called participatory art (as opposed to, say, video art) emerged from these early discussions of conceptual art and technology.

The 1990s works associated with relational aesthetics (a description that goes back to Lygia Clark's practice of the 1970s, which centered on what she called "relational objects") and today's networked projects are both dialogical and contextual; commonly used terms include "conversational art" (Homi K. Bhabha), "dialogue-based public art" (Tom Finkelpearl), and "dialogical art" (Grant Kester).⁹ In contemporary art, unlike traditional dialogical forms such as live music or theater, discursive practices are not distinct from, but rather constitute and frame, visual practice. But dialogue is not an intrinsic value. Who is talking to whom about what? What is the artistic element of participation in communities or social-networking projects? And can a shared space in Second Life help us to understand real life?¹⁰

Even as I write in 2008, there still exists a gap between conceptual works associated with relational aesthetics, works that address social practice, and works that reflect and act upon our networked and globalized society. What role do aesthetic concerns play when an artist claims to have a real impact on communities, intersubjective actions, political agendas, and networking tools? One thing is clear: the art is constituted only through the participant's activity. In the words of the artist Liam Gillick, "My work is like the light in the fridge, it only works when there are people there to open the fridge door.

For people, it's not art—it's something else—stuff in a room."¹¹ One can only hope that the fridge is not empty. Tom Marioni's salon, active since 1970 (see pl. 82), makes it clear that it is not: we are offered *FREE BEER!* But seriously, what are we participating in? Does sharing a drink create a new experience? The media theorist Geert Lovink reminds us that, at least in the online world, there is a one percent rule: "If you get a group of 100 people online one will create content, 10

⁸ See Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (1962), trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), and *Software: Information Technology; Its New Meaning for Art* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1970). Burnham's exhibition included, for example, Hans Haacke's *Visitors' Profile* (1970) as well as Sonia Sheridan's *Interactive Paper Systems* (1970), which engaged museumgoers in an exchange with the artist and a color photocopying machine. For a discussion of Burnham's legacy, see Edward A. Shanken, "The House That Jack Built: Jack Burnham's Concept of 'Software' as a Metaphor for Art" (1998), <http://www.artextra.com/house.html>, and Luke Skrebowski, "All Systems Go: Recovering Jack Burnham's 'Systems Aesthetics,'" *Tate Papers*, Spring 2006, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/06spring/skrebowski.htm>. Unless otherwise noted, all URLs cited in this essay were accessed June 24, 2008. ⁹ Grant Kester, who has written extensively about "conversation art," refers back to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the work of art as a "locus of differing meanings, interpretations and points of view." See Kester, "Conversation Pieces: Collaboration and Artistic Identity," in *Unlimited Partnerships: Collaboration in Contemporary Art* (Buffalo, NY: CEPA Gallery, 2000). ¹⁰ See Lynn Hershman Leeson's *Second Life project Life* (2006–present; figs. 29–30, pls. 168–70). ¹¹ Quoted in Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 61.

fig. 9
László Moholy-Nagy
Telephone Picture EM 3,
1922
Porcelain enamel on
steel / 9½ x 6 in. /
Museum of Modern Art,
New York, gift of Philip
Johnson in memory of
Sibyl Moholy-Nagy

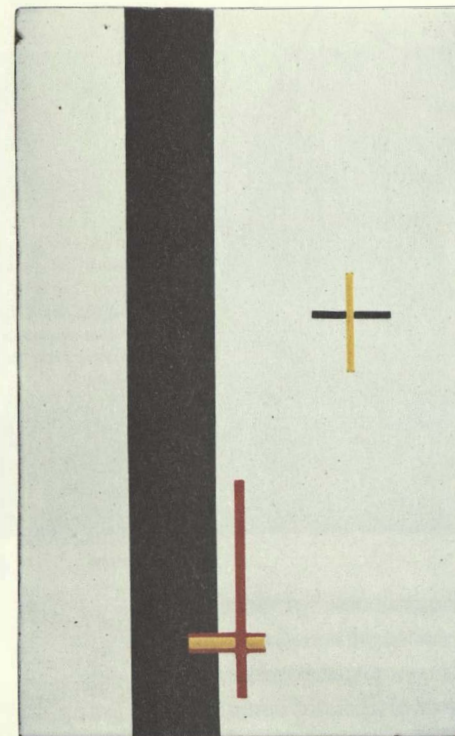


fig. 9

while one of his drawings invited visitors to fill in a blank space he had left in the composition. Hugo Ball's *Cabaret Voltaire* in Zurich (see fig. 4) staged scandalous events that made art history (and prefigured the Fluxus events of the 1960s [see pls. 12–13]), and at around the same time the Bauhaus in Weimar and Dessau realized the idea of a cross-disciplinary school, helping László Moholy-Nagy, among others, to develop a practice that combined sculpture and film, introducing a time-based aspect to the perception of art in space. But Moholy-Nagy went even further, conceiving art as something that could be industrially manufactured and ordered by phone. He designed his *Telephone Pictures*, made around 1922, as drawings on graph paper, but he left the actual production to an enamel factory, ordering versions of the same work via telephone (see fig. 9).¹² Marcel

¹² Geert Lovink, *Zero Comments: Blogging and Critical Internet Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2007), xxvii. ¹³ See <http://www.moma.org/collection/provenance/items/92.71.html>. For *Art by Telephone*, an exhibition planned by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, in 1968 but never realized, thirty-six artists, including Joseph Kosuth, Richard Serra, and James Lee Byars, were asked to call the museum to communicate their proposals, which would then be executed by MCA staff. In the same year Sol LeWitt developed his concept for wall drawings to be realized by the works' owners or museum staff. ¹⁴ Marcel Duchamp, letter to Suzanne Duchamp, January 15, 1916, reprinted in *Affectionately, Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk Ludion, trans. Jill Taylor (Ghent, Belgium: Ludion Press, 2000), 44.

will interact with it (commenting or offering improvements), and the other 89 will just view it."¹² The same might apply to participatory works of art in the museum.

In order to bridge the discursive gaps between technology and contemporary art, I will look at key historic figures and situations that emerged throughout the twentieth century: Bertolt Brecht, Dada, and an innovative museum practice by Alexander Dorner in the 1920s and 1930s; explorations of radical new art forms and public actions in the 1960s; and contemporary strategies today, a field that is influenced by institutional critique without being anti-institutional, and that is embracing networking technologies without claiming a utopian notion of technology.

Between the Wars: A Vision of the Future

In Cologne in 1920 Max Ernst placed an axe next to one of his sculptures in the Dada exhibition *Spring Awakening*,

Duchamp had been the first artist to "sign" a work remotely by communicating an instruction:

Take this bottle rack for yourself. I'm making it a "Ready-made," remotely. You are to inscribe it at the bottom and on the inside of the bottom circle, in small letters painted with a brush in oil, silver white color, with an inscription which I will give you herewith, and then sign it, in the same handwriting as follows: [after] Marcel Duchamp.¹⁴

Not only could the work be produced by others, but even the signature—the very embodiment of artistic identity—could be executed by someone else.

Alexander Dorner, the director of the Landesmuseum in Hannover, Germany, from 1923 through 1936, is generally

credited as one of the visionaries who helped to radically change the way we think about museums.¹⁵ He not only introduced the idea of a living museum—a museum of the present—but also revolutionized the concept of display. In 1927 he collaborated with the artist El Lissitzky on the realization of the famous *Abstract Cabinet*, whose walls appeared to change according to the works on display and the movements of visitors.¹⁶ Later, the *Room of Our Time* (fig. 10), designed

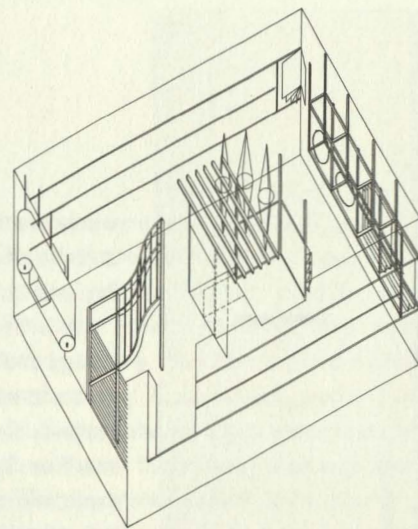


fig. 10

fig. 10
**László Moholy-Nagy
and Alexander Dörner**
Room of Our Time, 1931
Unrealized design for an
exhibition space at the
Landesmuseum, Hannover,
Germany

fig. 11
Installation view of the
1971 exhibition *Robert
Morris* at the Tate Gallery,
London, showing visitors
interacting with a
sculpture

by Moholy-Nagy and Dörner in 1931, conceptualized a more dynamic role for visitors, proposing that they view films by activating rolling screens and pushing buttons to start the projections—not unlike the act of setting in motion Moholy-Nagy's *Light Prop for an Electric Stage (Light-Space Modulator)* (1930), which casts a series of abstract compositions throughout the surrounding space.¹⁷ During the 1940s and 1950s, having fled Nazi Germany for the United States, Dörner continued to pursue his idea of a new museum:

The next type of art museum must be not only an "art" museum in the traditional, static sense, but, strictly speaking, not a "museum" at all. A museum conserves supposedly eternal values and truths. But the new type would be a kind of powerhouse, a producer of new energies.¹⁸

Duchamp took this idea of energizing the reception of art as far as technology allowed. In 1938, at the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* in Paris, visitors entering his totally dark space used flashlights to light up the art on display, thereby exhibiting their process of interaction with the works and the environment even as they illuminated the objects.¹⁹

The displacement of time and space was an artistic strategy that found its first agents in the 1920s. Its adherents proposed a vision of art that was no longer a finite object, but rather a time-based experience—a "living museum," to use Dörner's term—subject to the intervention of coproducers, be they institutional professionals, fellow artists, or audience members. Art happened through collaborative effort, sometimes via communication or remotely networked connections. Bertolt Brecht envisioned the potential of two-way communication in 1932—a year before his hopes were destroyed by Hitler and Goebbels—in the essay "The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication." He predicted that this apparatus would know

how to receive as well as to transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him. On this principle the radio should step out of the supply business and organize its listeners as suppliers. Any attempt by the radio to give a truly public character to public occasions is a step

¹⁵ See Samuel Cauman, *The Living Museum, Experiences of an Art Historian and Museum Director: Alexander Dörner* (New York: New York University Press, 1958). ¹⁶ "Lissitzky placed these unframed, self-transforming compositions by Picasso, Leger, Gleizes, Lissitzky, Gabo, Mondrian, Baumeister, and Moholy on walls striated with miles of vertically aligned metal strips. The strips, painted in three different colors, white, black, and gray, produced a cool shimmer that changed with the slightest movement of a visitor's head. To multiply this effect, the colors were applied in a different order in different wall areas.... Inserted in these vibrating, living walls were sliding panels. These, when moved, revealed more pictures underneath." Cauman, 103–4. ¹⁷ *Room of Our Time* was never fully functional or finished. ¹⁸ Alexander Dörner, *The Way Beyond "Art"* (1947), quoted in Cauman, 206. ¹⁹ Originally Duchamp had planned a sensor-driven lighting control so that the light would shine only when someone approached the work. This failed for technical reasons.



fig. 11

in the right direction.... Such an attempt by the radio to put its instruction into an artistic form would link up with the efforts of modern artists to give art an instructive character.²⁰

Obviously, Brecht is referring to himself as a modern artist. His proposal is based on the assumption that, were radio to make the vox populi heard, true public opinion would change society for the better—a hope we do not necessarily share today.

The 1960s: The Future Is Now

With their didactic agendas, agitprop art and Brecht's theater experiments implied a revolutionary subject. But after World War II, political art was tainted by association with fascist and communist policies that reacted strongly against the individualist notion of art. What individual or communal participation in art truly meant (beyond the vision of an educational process) was ambiguous. Postwar artists thus adopted a variety of complex strategies involving what Fluxus member Dick Higgins would term "intermedia," emphasizing an oppositional stance more than a specific agenda. Practitioners involved in Fluxus, in particular, helped to distribute a more open idea of instruction in the artistic context.

Yet the turn toward a more open model could result in a variety of actualizations of participation: a badly worded or misused instruction, a misinterpreted or disillusioning event, an artist's changing or obscuring attitude, or even the catastrophic end of the entire exhibition. In 2002 a visitor to a retrospective of work by the Fluxus artist Yoko Ono at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art reported having an antagonistic phone conversation when Ono's infamous *Telephone Piece* (1996) rang. The encounter was conditioned by the anxiety produced by the event, the artist's unexpectedly annoyed reactions, and the public observing the conversation.²¹ Alternatively, Robert Morris's 1971 retrospective at London's Tate Gallery had to be closed after visitors destroyed some

²⁰ Quoted in *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation*, ed. John G. Hanhardt (New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1986), 53–54. ²¹ See http://www.bozoz.com/yoko_ono.html. A more recent installation of the work appeared at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia as part of the 2007 exhibition *Ensemble*; one of the guards there mentioned to me that the artist often called outside the museum's opening hours. ²² A number of artists have reinterpreted *Cut Piece*, including Lynn Herschman Leeson (1993), Felipe Dulzaides (2002), Marina Abramović (2006), and even Yoko Ono herself (1965 and 2003; pls. 45–46).

of the works through overuse (see fig. 11). But to what extent can one actually speak of failure? One might argue that it was the public's enthusiastic response to the Morris exhibition that ultimately forced the institutional authorities to act. It was Ono again who "exhibited" and made explicit the aggressiveness of her (specifically male) audience through her historic and frequently reenacted 1964 performance *Cut Piece* (pl. 47), in which she literally offered up her person as an object to work on.²² Marina Abramović took this a step further in her performance *Rhythm 0* (1974; pl. 56), during which the dynamics of visitor participation evolved from inactivity in the first hours to serious aggression later on. By the end,

some viewers began to make such eager use of some of the potentially harmful objects Abramović had provided on a table that others present felt the need to intervene, ending the performance in order to protect the artist the moment a revolver was picked up.²³

The possibility of ignoring instructions and social boundaries ultimately reveals the inherent conflicts of a proposal, mirroring a specific condition in which the actualization of a piece occurs. To engage with a work requires a willingness to be intrigued or challenged by its implicit and explicit rules of behavior. When these are violated, the responsibility of the participants is dramatically exposed. A participatory work thus needs an environment that makes possible the actual enactment of these rules. However, as the Morris example shows, this represents a fragile balance of trust and responsibility. The audience's exploitation of proposed situations or even the total absence of participation (a concept that no one enacts or realizes, an invitation that no one accepts)—these possibilities are inherent to the potentiality of participatory art. Yet the extent to which a work generates an ongoing engagement, as opposed to the provocation of an end, may be considered a measure of its participatory quality.

Artists have always been aware of the distinction between idea/concept/score and realization/practice/performance. In fact, one question runs persistently through discussions of participatory art: where does the artwork reside—in the text, in the act of reading, in the act of imagining the enactment, or in the act of doing it? Many Fluxus pieces relied upon the idea that one person could activate the work (or, alternatively, upon its representational activation by a select number of performers for the public), but they

did not necessarily need to be acted out in space. Ono often worked with enigmatic and poetic instructions, first exhibited to a Western audience at George Maciunas's AG Gallery, New York, in 1961. The display of text was combined with the possibility of realization, offering instructions to be carried out by the visitors. Ono's *Painting to Be Stepped On* (1960)—"Leave a piece of canvas or finished painting on the floor or in the street"—was originally conceived to be completed by chance and contingent factors. The art historian Bruce Altshuler calls it a logical step that in Ono's May 1962 exhibition at the Sogetsu Art Center, Tokyo, she displayed only instructions on sheets of white paper.²⁴ This act of simplification and purification—which in some ways prefigured Minimalism—represented an attempt to leave behind more theatrical tactics, such as her first address to the audience during the 1962 performance *Audience Piece*. In fact, theatricality would seem to be an antithetical position for visual artists for a long time to come.

Most prolific in generating ideas and poetic strategies was the American artist George Brecht, whose event cards were distributed via Fluxus editions such as *Water*

fig. 12
George Brecht
Score for Two Exercises,
1961
Offset lithography /
Archiv Sohm, Staatsgalerie
Stuttgart, Germany

TWO EXERCISES

Consider an object. Call what is not the object "other."

EXERCISE: Add to the object, from the "other," another object, to form a new object and a new "other."
Repeat until there is no more "other."

EXERCISE: Take a part from the object and add it to the "other," to form a new object and a new "other."
Repeat until there is no more object.

Foll, 1961

fig. 12

brink of vanishing into invisibility. At the same time, they were an effective counterpoint to the neo-Dada Fluxus events staged by Joseph Beuys or Wolf Vostell, which were ultimately driven by the artist's persona (this was the inherent paradox of Beuys's collaborative and participatory political practice [see pls. 78–79]).

Although visual experimentation has had a long tradition in literature since Stéphane Mallarmé (a fact reflected by one of Dan Graham's earliest conceptual works, the *Schema* poem from 1966 [pl. 11]), it was Sol LeWitt who legitimized the linguistic formulation of an idea as artwork, triggering a whole series of art-by-instruction pieces.²⁵ Lawrence Weiner, who, like Huebler, was among the artists promoted by the New York gallerist Seth Siegelaub, started his signature text-based work after one of his early outdoor sculptures was destroyed by the public. His insight was that the idea was enough for him, and he consequently ranked the idea higher than any actual realization.²⁶ Weiner's solution to the problem of open and potentially destructive situations was conceptual

and still represented a one-way communication between sender (artist) and receiver (collector), but it inspired artists such as Huebler, Graham, and Hans Haacke to examine the larger social, political, and economic powers at work in the art world—including the conditions of participating in a show, owning a work, and exhibiting. Early on, Haacke analyzed these conditions as an ideological frame:

[Artists are] unwitting partners in the arts syndrome and relate to each other dialectically. They participate jointly in the maintenance and/or development of the ideological make-up of their society. They work within that frame, set the frame, and are being framed.²⁷

Those who act on a given work and its frame are thus not merely anonymous participants. They include a series of active stakeholders: the gallerist, collector, curator, critic, and

representatives of supervising authorities, such as municipal or state commissions and trustees. Reflecting this political framework, Haacke's *News* (1969; pl. 70) exhibited the

²⁵ See Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* (June 1967): 79–83, and the more playful approach of John Baldessari in his painting *Terms Most Useful in Describing Creative Works of Art* (1966–68; pl. 62). ²⁶ The most generic of Weiner's conceptual pieces is an untitled statement from 1969: "1. The artist may construct the work / 2. The work may be fabricated / 3. The work need not be built / Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist / The decision as to condition rests with / The receiver upon the occasion of receivership." Szeemann, n.p. ²⁷ Hans Haacke, "All the 'Art' That's Fit to Show," in *Art into Society, Society into Art* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1974), reprinted in *Museums by Artists*, ed. A. A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983), 152.

²³ In a similar event, *Purple Cross for Absent Now* (1979), Jochen Gerz invited audience participation by asking visitors to pull on a rope tied around his neck while watching his face on a monitor. Looking only at his screen representation seemed to free people to engage in ways that included inflicting potential physical harm.

²⁴ See Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions* (1964; repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), n.p.

real-time processes of political decision making by being the first artwork to bring the daily news into the gallery. Technically speaking, participation in art is a given in nearly every instance in which art is publicly exhibited (though participation in the form of professional contributions by museum or gallery staff is likely to be invisible). Artists such as Haacke and Stephen Willats (see pls. 72–74) consequently address issues of control, often deliberately limiting participation to a predefined set of choices through voting.

The implication of unwitting participants (individuals or institutions without a specific interest in the work) is a frequent participatory strategy. Consider, for example, the role of the postman in the dissemination of mail art (see pl. 21), the unsuspecting museum visitors approached by Vito Acconci during *Proximity Piece* (1970; pl. 58), the state authorities provoked by Sanja Iveković's private activity in *Triangle* (1979), the customs agents who censored Maria Eichhorn's *Prohibited Imports* (2003; pl. 117), and the Mexican police officers who played a decisive role in Francis Alÿs's *Re-enactments* (2001; pls. 133–38). A critical participatory strategy is thus to expose precisely the conditions that frame and limit actions in public space.²⁸ Alÿs's piece, however, goes beyond

ideological critique to examine a variety of patterns of complicity. The cooperation of the authorities in his reenactment complicates the matter and irritates the viewer who witnesses the same action on parallel screens. In fact, the very notion of reenactment—see also Ono's 2003 take on *Cut Piece* (pl. 46)—points toward the possibility of shifting conditions and contexts, in the real world and in the arts. The urgency of early performance—"no rehearsal" was Abramović/Ulay's motto—is confronted with a more complex representation as rehearsal or reenactment.

The 1960s not only saw a divide between conceptual and political artists, but also marked the emergence of others who, influenced by Fluxus and the rise of happenings in the wake of Kaprow (see pls. 9, 28–34), challenged spectators emotionally or even physically. Brazilian artists were among the most active and creative in addressing art's relation to participants. Hélio Oiticica, for example, saw his installation *Eden* (1969; pl. 43) as a "suprasensorial experiment" and an embodiment of his concept of "creleisure" (creative leisure). He created a series of costumes called *Parangolés*, Brazilian slang for "agitated situation" or "sudden confusion."²⁹ For *Opinião 65*, a 1965 exhibition at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro, Oiticica invited street dancers to perform wearing his *P4 Cape 1*—a radical, carnivalistic intervention into an official event that resulted in the expulsion of the

²⁸ In his essay in this volume, Robert Atkins writes about participation as a politically liberating act, with specific reference to the ACT UP movement and Antoni Muntadas. Muntadas's critical practice denounces any false hope in naive participation on a political level, as testified by *The File Room* (1994–present), his seminal online project on acts of censorship. See <http://www.thefileroom.org>.
²⁹ See http://universes-in-universe.de/doc/oiticica/e_oitic3.htm.

dancers. The practice of Lygia Clark, meanwhile, evolved from the production of minimalist and constructivist sculpture to the creation of group experiences outside the art context, eventually focusing on a serious concept of therapy or "self-structuration." Like Oiticica's sensuous installations, Clark's group-therapy situations and relational objects (see pls. 36–39) sought to create temporary situations and spaces that facilitated a more open and body-centered experience of art. Thus, institutional critique could also take the form of testbeds for new and liberated social interactions. These artists provided opportunities for communal gatherings and discourse that prefigured the idea of an open system that is constructed by participants—what we might call "true" participation today. Such a system can incorporate pre-given rules and also establish new ones collaboratively. In either case, there is no work if it is not actively and collaboratively constructed, physically or mentally. "It is art if I say so" (to paraphrase Robert Rauschenberg) thus becomes "It is art if you think so" (Lawrence Weiner).³⁰

The degree to which a work is a social activity can also influence its reception. If it happens in the context of the art world, it is easily identified; if it happens elsewhere, the project becomes more closely associated with community work or even invisible as art, vanishing altogether into the fabric of real life.³¹ In New York, real life is constituted partly by cocktail parties, or at least we might get that impression from documents on Argentinean artists' contributions to the new communal media practice of the late 1960s. In 1968, at the Art Gallery of the Center for Inter-American Relations, Marta Minujin conceived one of the first open projects to incorporate the media in a participatory instal-

lation. She called her project, *Minucode* (pl. 35), a "multi-social and media environment experience":

320 people belonging to four different social groups, selected from answers to a questionnaire published in several metropolitan newspapers, were invited to four "group" cocktail parties. During the cocktail parties, which were filmed, eight representatives of each group were asked to create a second environment or light show in an adjoining room. Now you are going to have an audiovisual experience which consists in the projection of each of the cocktail parties' films and the recreation, at the same time, of the light show created by the eight representatives of each cocktail party. This experience is the MINUCODE.³²

The artist's division of the participants into groups was intended to reflect the social divisions of "economy, politics, entertainment, and ornamentation."

Minujin's audiovisual representation of social categories was not realized in real time, and it also included a process of decision making by the artist. The Argentinean Group Frontera, however, took a different approach to participation with their recording booth and playback device (pl. 71) in the 1970 exhibition *Information*, organized by Kynaston McShine at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. "All individuals

³⁰ In 1961 Rauschenberg was invited to participate in an exhibition at Galerie Iris Clert, Paris, in which artists were to create and display portraits of the gallery's owner. His contribution was a telegram declaring, "This is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say so." "It is art if you think so" is not a direct quote of Weiner, but rather a summary of his stance. ³¹ For more on this notion, see the Kester writings cited above; *What We Want Is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art*, ed. Ted Purves (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2004); and *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices*, ed. Johanna Billing, Maria Lind, and Lars Nilsson (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007). ³² Marta Minujin, undated exhibition proposal, *Information* exhibition archive folders, Museum of Modern Art, New York.



fig. 13

fig. 13

Eventstructure
Research Group
(Theo Botschuijver,
Jeffrey Shaw, and Sean
Wellesley-Miller)
Airground, 1968

Installation view at the
Brighton Festival, England,
1968 / Air-inflated PVC /
590½ × 590½ × 472½ in. /
Courtesy the artists

fig. 14

calc
DROPone, 1999

Installation view at
Cittadellarte, Biella, Italy,
1999 / Silk, fiberglass,
plywood, and aluminum /
236¾ × 157½ × 157½ in. /
Courtesy the artists

are creators," they stated, "but what they create is not necessarily forcefully incorporated into the cultural framework. The introduction of a micro-medium into the mass media is necessary."³³ The group encouraged an alternative method of production that was open to all participants, countering the dominant mode of television (and prefiguring the idea of an open platform as developed in 1980 by artists such as Wendy Clarke in her video production *Love Letters* and Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz in their seminal public satellite event *Hole-in-Space* [pls. 90–91]). Group Frontera's was titled *Itinerary of Experience*, and it ironically envisioned participants' frustration with their own electronic performance. Step six of the itinerary was thus described as "Person unhappy with results," causing step seven, "Person smashing mechanism," leading to the eventual "complete disintegration" of the piece in step twelve.³⁴

Exhibiting the audience was an ambivalent process that demanded a more active or engaged viewer.³⁵ It was precisely this initial embrace of the audience's frustration, anger, or disinterest that would be lost in some of the more didactic and utopian manifestations of alternative collaborative and participatory structures. Joseph Beuys (pls. 76–79), for example, promoted the notion of social plastic, but he was too much of an artistic celebrity to ever become one with his political fight or be an equal member of a political group. Guy Debord's Situationist International, meanwhile, dismissed the art system as inherently "spectacular." Following the educational model of Brecht or Beuys, other artists chose to address the supposedly passive audience directly, activating that "medium" in a very physical sense. As a result, a gap opened between the perception of an artistic experience as inherently open and the proclaimed activation of that process.

³³ Kynaston McShine, *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 47. ³⁴ Other steps included ten, "Heading for Kynaston McShine's office," although the curator would have departed for Argentina during step eleven. Group Frontera, undated exhibition proposal, *Information* exhibition archive folders, Museum of Modern Art, New York. ³⁵ See, for example, Peter Weibel's closed-circuit installation *Audience Exhibited* (1969) and VALIE EXPORT's TAPP- und TASTKINO (TAP and TOUCH CINE MA, 1968; pls. 49–50) and *Facing the Family* (1971).

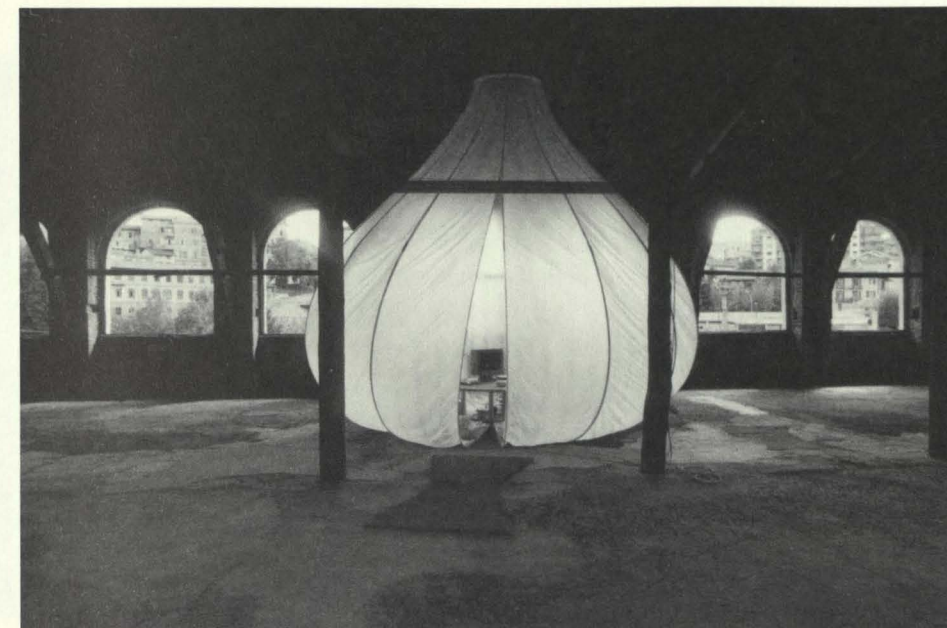


fig. 14

The 1990s to Now: Revisiting the Future

Although the utopian investment of Fluxus and early media artists in collaborative and networked practices ultimately failed to change society at large (or even the museum as an institution), practitioners of the 1990s revived their predecessors' approach to open situations, marking the end of a decade that avoided exploration of participatory social concepts.³⁶ A conceptual and artistic trajectory links Moholy-Nagy's *Telephone Pictures* and LeWitt's wall drawings to the 1990s, a decade that witnessed the creation of physical, networked, and online platforms for dialogue and interaction with the public—projects

that often invited participants to *become* the artwork (see, for example, the video productions of Sylvie Blocher [pl. 151], Annika Eriksson, and Phil Collins).

From Ben Vautier (who exhibited himself to the public in *Sculpture vivante* [Living Sculpture, 1962]) to Ben Kinmont (who offered passersby occasions to debate his artistic proposal for *I am for you, Ich bin für Sie* [1990–92]), this trajectory moves us beyond definitions of art and nonart. It took a new generation of artists in the early 1990s—some of them associated with relational aesthetics, a term coined by Nicolas Bourriaud—to review and reformulate notions of open systems and participation that were first introduced in the 1960s. Some were content to stage conceptual gestures as opposed to concrete interventions in the social fabric of the community; others refused a

³⁶ The years 1977 to 1982 witnessed a series of seminal satellite projects that explored the advances of global telecommunication networks and addressed spaces for interaction that previously seemed to belong entirely to monopolistic and national agencies such as broadcasting and industrial networks. In 1977 the live satellite broadcast for the opening of *Documenta 6* included Nam June Paik, Joseph Beuys (pl. 76), and Douglas Davis; the same year Liza Bear, Willoughby Sharp, and Keith Sonnier produced *Send/Receive Satellite Network: Phase II. "Artists' Use of Telecommunications,"* a February 16, 1980, conference at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art organized by La Mamelie Inc. and SFMOMA, allowed participants to use a computer time-sharing network that offered free user accounts and functioned as an art-communication medium through an online chat and text exchange. Some participants were also able to use a slow-scan TV system (video images transmitted over the telephone). Other significant early telecommunication events, including Robert Adrian X's *The World in 24 Hours* (1982; pl. 113) and Roy Ascott's *La plissure du texte* (1983), proved too visionary to grab public attention in the 1980s—a decade in which expressive painting dominated the art scene, marginalizing artistic projects based on technology. This only changed significantly in 1992 with Ponton European Media Art Lab / Van Gogh TV's collaborative and participatory television event *Piazza virtuale* for *Documenta 9*.

specific social function for their proposals.³⁷ Despite an oft-proclaimed interest in social agendas associated with communal events (as seen in many Rirkrit Tiravanija projects) and in the creation of modular furniture that facilitates undefined gatherings (as in N55's *Hygiene System* [1997], Jorge Pardo's public pavilion for *Skulptur Projekte Münster* 1997, and c l c's *DROPone* workspace for Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Cittadellarte* [1999; fig. 14]), most of these social spaces were confined to the art world. A second aspect is noteworthy: these updates on 1960s strategies rarely make use of today's networking technologies. They insist instead on a low-tech approach, stressing performative physical events and activities. Many refer back to the modular, precarious objects and installations of Clark and Oiticica, yet strangely ignore precedents such as the conceptual artist Tom Marioni or the activist collectives Ant Farm (see pls. 85–88) and Eventstructure Research Group (fig. 13).³⁸

How, then, can an artwork include not only friends and peers, but also an undefined group of participants? How might the artist address a larger public without becoming simplistic, didactic, or compromised? Harrell Fletcher and Jon Rubin's *Pictures Collected from Museum Visitors' Wallets* (1998; pls. 123–24) started off with a participatory intervention in the museum space, which yielded the final artistic selection. Jochen Gerz, on the other hand, is no longer interested in exhibiting aesthetic choices made alone in the studio. The museum or the public space at large becomes his studio. His project *The Gift* (2000; pls. 147–50) does not question the "product" as such, but rather the way in which a work that is collaboratively produced, exhibited, and distributed can embody an actual representation of its coproducers. A community of museum visitors is documented in a temporary portrait gallery that is collected onsite but later dispersed throughout the city, region, or beyond. The museum unleashes its own products in a gesture of generosity toward those who were generous enough to contribute their portraits.

A great deal of critical attention has been directed at ways in which artists deal with institutional framing. The practice of institutional critique, as embodied by Haacke and Andrea Fraser (pl. 167), has worked to dissect the power regimes and ideological structures at work in the art world. It is equally interesting, though, to reflect on the public's use of the museum, whether prompted by an artist (Janet Cardiff's video walks [pls. 159–66]) or by the audience's own desires. Despite the structural conditions of the institutional setting—the need to obey the rules of quiet contemplation, not touch the artwork, respect the laws of ownership, etc.—visitors are constantly adopting tactical ways of using the museum. The French critic Michel de Certeau described a range of subjective counterpractices (cunning, tricks, maneuvers) as "weak." In the museum context,

fig. 15
Martin Walde
The Web, 2006
Installation view at
Kunsthaus Basel, Basel,
Municipality of Basel,
Switzerland, 2006 /
Strings, carbon rods, and
springs / Courtesy Galerie
Krinzinger, Vienna

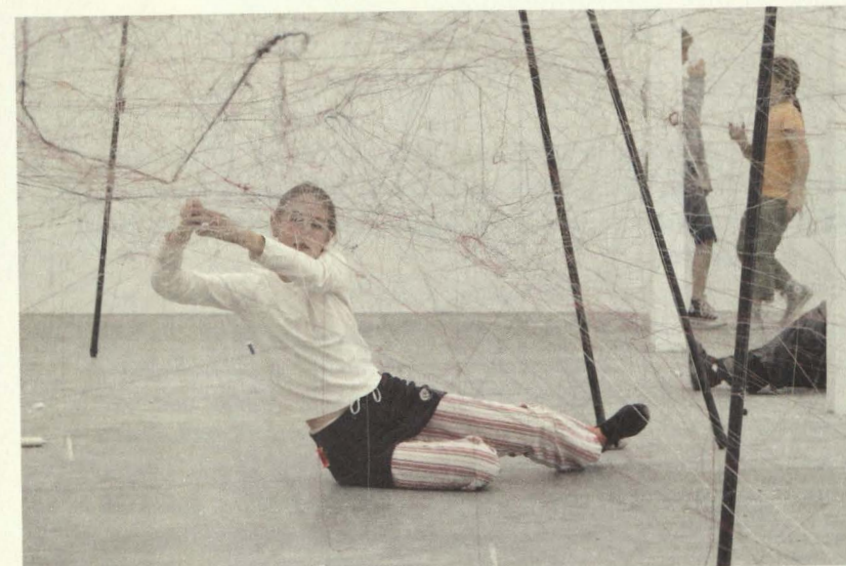


fig. 15

weak tactics might include drifting through an exhibition, simulating contemplation, or secretly taking pictures: a "fleeting and massive reality of a social activity at play with the order that contains it."³⁹ It is only through these personalized actions that the museum becomes what de Certeau would call "habitable"—a "space borrowed for a moment by a transient."⁴⁰ Artists such as Erwin Wurm (pls. 141–44) and Martin Walde (fig. 15), far from criticizing strong institutional ties, have successfully developed accessible yet also absurd or even obscure practices involving collaborative, performative actions. In their best moments, these actions transcend readability to posit a profound ambiguity, provoking "weak" responses toward the institution and the production process. By refusing

to control such engagement through ubiquitous surveillance policies or, more subtly, to channel specific readings through didactic exhibition paths, a museum that offers open spaces for undefined interactions could radically change our general perception of the institution as an inflexible, deadening container.

Once again, artists have come to consider the museum a terrain for potentially transformative experiences, as Dorner envisioned in the 1920s. They openly address its codified spaces as social sites for singular visitors as well as for communities.⁴¹ Without adhering to a specific political or activist agenda, artists and curators are exploring ways to address social relations beyond the ideological readings of Marxism and critical theory that dominated the discourse of the 1960s and 1970s, most notably expressed in the radical positions of Debord and the Situationists. But it is still an

open question whether these practices actually constitute what Bourriaud calls "a social interstice [that] updates Situationism and reconciles it, as far as it is possible, with the

37 Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon, France: Les presses du réel, 2002) provoked numerous critical responses, most notably by Claire Bishop (to whom Liam Gillick and Grant Kester responded in turn). For a comprehensive study of their research, see Bishop's reader *Participation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006) and Kester's essays in *Conversation Pieces* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Whereas Bishop argues that the participatory experience needs to be acknowledged on a much broader scale, Kester—harking back to Eco's seminal *Open Work*—criticizes the lack of social responsibility and political impact from which relational aesthetics suffers even as it stakes a claim for microutopian concepts. Neither author, however, shows any interest in specifically media-related forms of participation. 38 "We propose the precarious as a new concept of existence against all the static crystallisation in the duration," Clark stated in 1983. *Lygia Clark* (Barcelona: Fundació Tàpies, 1994), 221.

39 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xxiv. 40 *Ibid.*, xxi.

41 In 2002, for example, Lee Mingwei addressed the museum as a living environment and involved the museum staff as hosts of *The Living Room*. Each host, including the artist, initiated discussions about the objects and personal belongings that they had brought into the "living room." The artist also worked with students and a kindergarten community on the importance of everyday objects. "I believe that the essence of this Museum does not reside merely in its architecture and objects, but also in its staff and extended family, who make this place function as a living organism on a day-to-day basis." http://gardnermuseum.org/education/airlee_text.html.

art world.”⁴² Even if artists conceive their works as models for different ways of being together, of working together, of producing together—as playful, temporary interventions that are easily dissolved—they can generate meaningful aesthetic and social experiences without making (micro)utopian claims.

When an artwork is subject to public intervention, it does not necessarily become more interesting or aesthetically charged. What is exhibited is rather the extent to which simple communality or antagonistic forces are acted out. The installation *1st Public White Cube* (2001; pls. 183–92), by the net art pioneers Blank & Jeron (in collaboration with Gerrit Gohlke), stages precisely this conflict at the center of the museum galleries. It is their contention that museum space and inclusion in exhibitions are for sale—a position that is antagonistic to any curatorial vision. Yet they frame this process, define the situation, and adapt the context to their artistic needs. By the same token, online projects such as Dan Phiffer and Mushon Zer-Aviv’s *ShiftSpace* (2007–present; pl. 174) and Jonah Brucker-Cohen and Mike Bennett’s *BumpList: An email community for the determined* (2003; pls. 177–78) draw our attention to the distinctive conditions of participation on the internet. Contributions by Antoni Muntadas (pl. 114), Maria Eichhorn (pls. 116–17), Minerva Cuevas (pls. 130–31), and Warren Sack (pl. 155) demonstrate that the potential for global networking does not rule out exclusion and ideological framing.

To say that artists can “fill in the cracks in the social bond” may overemphasize their role, but many practitioners do understand their work as an articulation of social conditions, including “the participation of a multiplicity of voices in the democratic agon, thereby helping to mobilize passions towards democratic objectives.”⁴³ Chantal Mouffe’s philosophical critique of conciliatory notions of community and Jean-Luc Nancy’s insistence on the community as an interruption of singularities (“Community is made of interruption of singularities... community is not the work of singular beings”) make us aware of potential conflicts that may be addressed.⁴⁴ These ideas might inspire administrative and

curatorial anxiety, but they should also be understood as possibilities for shaping a more inclusive form of practice. The museum, from this perspective, is no longer a container for art, nor does it manufacture consensual communities. If successful, it becomes a producer of and an arena for social and aesthetic

⁴² Bourriaud, 85. ⁴³ Ibid., 36; Chantal Mouffe, “The Mistakes of the Moralistic Response,” quoted in Liam Gillick, “Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop’s Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* 115 (Winter 2006): 99. ⁴⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1991), 31.

experiences, temporarily interrupting singularities through the presentation of participatory art that actively generates a discursive public space. And as we head back home or to work after visiting the exhibition, this may resonate with us for a time, fostering a desire...

to be continued by the reader.

This catalogue is published by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in association with Thames & Hudson, New York and London, on the occasion of the exhibition *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now*, organized by Rudolf Frieing for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and on view November 8, 2008, through February 8, 2009.

The exhibition is generously funded by The James Irvine Foundation and SFMOMA's Collectors Forum. Additional support is provided by Goethe-Institut San Francisco.

the James Irvine
foundation

Director of Publications: Chad Coerver
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Design: Volume Inc.
Color separations: Echelon

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San Francisco, California, 94103.

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First published in 2008 in hardcover in the United States of America by Thames
& Hudson Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10110.
thamesandhudsonusa.com

First published in the United Kingdom in 2008 by Thames & Hudson Ltd,
181A High Holborn, London WC1V 7QX.
thamesandhudson.com

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2008901217

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-500-23858-5

Cover:

Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz *Hole in Space*, 1980 (see pls. 90–91)

Front endsheets:

Wolf Vostell *9 Decollagen*, 1963 / *Happening in Wuppertal*, Germany, 1963 / Archiv Sohm, Staatsgalerie
Stuttgart, Germany

Erwin Wurm *One Minute Sculptures*, 1997 (see pls. 141–42)

Frontispieces:

Pages 2–3: **Tom Marioni** *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends Is the Highest Form of Art*, 1970–2008 (see pl. 82)

Pages 4–5: **Matthias Gommel** *Delayed*, 2002 (see pl. 157)

Pages 6–7: **Lygia Clark** *Rede de elástico* (Elastic Net), 1973 (see pl. 37)

Back endsheets:

Felix Gonzalez-Torres *Untitled*, 1992/1993 (see pl. 119)

Jochen Gerz *The Gift*, 2000 (see pl. 147)

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Photography credits appear on page 212.

Printed and bound in Germany by Cantz.

CONTENTS

10	Director's Foreword / Neal Benezra
12	Introduction / Rudolf Frieing
18	A Genealogy of Participatory Art / Boris Groys
32	Toward Participation in Art / Rudolf Frieing
50	Politics, Participation, and Meaning in the Age of Mass Media / Robert Atkins
66	Art after Web 2.0 / Lev Manovich
81	Plates / Texts by Rudolf Frieing, Melissa Pellico, and Tanya Zimbardo
201	Notes to Plate Entries
204	Catalogue of the Exhibition
208	Index