In the Illusory Babels of Language: Contemporary Artists’ Novels

Gage Pearson Frink
Bard College

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In the Illusory Babels of Language:
Contemporary Artists’ Novels

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The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by

Gage Frink

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Dedication

For my parents, Jennifer and Gant—I am eternally grateful for your open-mindedness and unceasing support. For my sister and closest friend, Sabena. For my grandmothers, Kamille and Pam—I am forever in awe of your strength and grace. For my uncle Jamie, a true mentor. For G., to whom I am immensely thankful for introducing me to the pleasures of art history. For my adviser Alex Kitnick, who helped shape this project; thank you for your trust and encouragement. For Robert Smithson and Craig Owens.
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Introduction

Part I: Artist as Writer

In her essay “The Dematerialization of Art,” first published in the periodical *Art International* in 1968, critic Lucy Lippard cautiously declares that “sometime in the near future it may be necessary for the writer to be an artist as well as for the artist to be a writer.”1 Written during the height of Conceptual art’s first wave, Lippard’s statement arises out of what she perceives as somewhat of a crisis on the role of the art critic, invoked by the “dematerialization” of the artwork. Lippard suggests that an idea-based art “bypasses criticism,” as “the pedantic or didactic or dogmatic basis insisted on by many of these artists is incorporated in the art.”2 When taken out of context, Lippard’s words seem prophetic, as a number of the twenty-first century’s most important artists can just as easily be referred to as writers. In recent years, artists have increasingly incorporated literary work and the act of writing as essential elements of their artistic practice, pointing to larger questions regarding the post-medium nature of contemporary art in the present day. However, in order to consider how we got here, we must first look to the period in which Lippard predicted the arrival of the artist-writer as figure, as Conceptual art generated an increased engagement with language as material and book as medium.

Emerging in New York City in the mid-to-late 1960s, the first wave of Conceptual art was not so much a coherent “movement” as a moment in which new methods of artistic production and a reconsideration of the art object came bubbling to the surface. These methods are distilled in Sol LeWitt’s “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” a text written in 1967 that would prove to become the closest approximation to a manifesto of early Conceptualism. LeWitt writes,

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1 Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, “The Dematerialization of Art,” in *Art International* vol. 12, no. 2 (February 1968), 36.
2 Ibid.
“In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.”

By advocating for this mode of artistic production and evaluation, LeWitt denies the idea that the art object must represent a vehicle for individual expression, or even a distinctly visual experience. The artist suggests that so long as the artwork conveys the embodiment of an idea, the aesthetic nature of the work’s physical form is of minimal importance. As evidenced by the work of key figures in the early Conceptual moment such as Robert Barry and Lee Lozano, the formal manifestations of conceptual projects were oftentimes devoid of form altogether. However, a crucial component of the aesthetic legacy of the first wave of Conceptual art is the rise of the artist’s book as form.

While the origins of the idea of the “artist’s book” as medium has antecedents in the self-published books of William Blake and the limited edition pamphlets and publications of various international avant-garde movements of the early twentieth-century, Conceptual art provided the artist’s book with a theoretical support for the medium’s viability as a visual art form unto itself. In the context of Conceptualism’s disavowal of an aesthetic experience based on sensory gratification or skilled craftsmanship, the book became a legitimate medium through which artists could present their “ideas” and “concepts,” which LeWitt posits as the artwork’s essence. As Lucy Lippard claims in her 1977 article “The Artist’s Book Goes Public,” which charts the continued rise of the form through the 1970s, “[Ed] Ruscha’s books were a major starting point

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4 For Barry’s work Uranyl Nitrate (UO$_2$(NO$_3$)$_2$), the artist placed a small amount of a radioactive compound in the gallery space at Kunsthalle Bern, emphasizing the invisibility of the material’s radioactive effects. In her infamous Dropout Piece, Lee Lozano dropped out of the art world altogether.
for the as-yet-unnamed Conceptual art, a so-called movement (actually a medium, or third stream) which made one of its most vital contributions by validating the book as a legitimate medium for visual art.” ⁵ Throughout the sixties, Ruscha published a series of books that presented the reader with suites of photographs. The first of these books, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, published in 1963, provides readers with little more than what its title describes—photographs of twenty-six gas stations taken by Ruscha along Route 66. Ruscha’s books were both cheap (the retail price of *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* was $3.50) and nondescript, as the artist was aiming not for exclusivity, but an art object that was straightforward in its presentation of ideas and easily distributable. As noted by Lippard, while Ruscha worked in a different milieu than the first wave of Conceptual artists, his artist’s books provide early examples of the distinct manner in which Conceptualism would utilize the book as a visual medium.

The artist’s book is distinguishable from other, more conventional forms that books pertaining to visual art take (such as books that document and provide reproductions of artworks, or exhibition catalogues) in a number of ways. While visual mediums such as paintings are oftentimes represented and contextualized by art historians in typically coffee table-friendly books that can help canonize an artist or provide a clearer understanding of their work and its historical implications, these books do not add to an artist’s oeuvre—they merely document it. Many of the intermediaries between artist and viewer necessary for the publication of surveys or catalogues is absent in the case of artists’ books, as these books represent objects envisioned entirely by the artist or artists who they are attributed to. And, unlike expository books, the artist’s book does not rely on other forms of media in addition to text (though, as in the case of

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Ruscha’s use of photography in *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, they certainly can incorporate other mediums).

Regarding the motivating forces behind the proliferation of artists’ books during the early Conceptual period, curator Seth Siegelaub claims:

> When we were making books in the sixties, we had this crazy idea that somehow the books…would somehow be found at the local central station, and people would pick up a [Lawrence] Weiner or whatever, a [Douglas] Huebler catalogue or something, and take their trip to Brussels reading this thing…And we thought that the possibility of the book enlarged the possible field of a contact, a communication with the general public.  

Those most devoted to the Conceptual project maintained a vision of the artist’s book as a utopic medium that would overcome the echo chamber of the highbrow art world thanks to the form’s ability to circulate outside of the gallery space. While Siegelaub acknowledges a degree of naivety in his hopes that these books would be picked up and read by commuters in the same manner as a magazine or novel, the artist’s book *does* provide the potential for widespread distribution that other visual mediums of the period do not. And with that distribution comes an interaction with an untraceable audience, yet one that always maintains the possibility of exposure to new viewers—including those who do not typically engage with contemporary art.

Lucy Lippard comes to a similar conclusion when determining the forces behind the medium’s rise, writing, “The artist’s book is the product of several art and non-art phenomena of the [1960s], among them a heightened social consciousness, the immense popularity of paperback books, a new awareness of how art (especially the costly ‘precious object’) can be used as a commodity by a capitalist society…and a rebellion against the increasing elitism of the art world and its planned obsolescence.”  

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Conceptual artists hoped to increase the accessibility of their work while demonstrating an aversion to the commodification of the art object. Lippard echoes Siegelaub’s mass market bent, proclaiming that “one day I’d like to see artists’ books ensconced in supermarkets, drugstores and airports.”

Though Lippard and Siegelaub’s aspirations for the medium reflect certain misapprehensions regarding both the legibility and mass appeal of a majority of artists’ books of the Conceptual period, their optimism serves to underscore the democratizing intentions behind the proliferation of the form in the sixties.

However, experimentation with the artist’s book as medium must be considered alongside another defining aspect of the Conceptual legacy: the sustained inquiry into the possibilities of language as material and subject of art. The exploration of language proved to be an inevitable product of LeWitt’s notion that the idea or concept that generates a work of art be prioritized by the artist, as language remains the most basic and familiar tool through which abstract ideas can be delineated and communicated. In his 1969 text “Sentences on Conceptual Art,” LeWitt declares that “if words are used, and they proceed from ideas about art, then they are art and not literature.”

This dictum would lead to a variety of methods by which artists incorporated language into their practice. Many, such as Lawrence Weiner and Joseph Kosuth, used text as raw visual material, creating installations comprised of words or phrases and placing them in the gallery context. Weiner treated the white walls of the gallery as a blank page, formulating oftentimes ambiguous phrases and arranging them strategically on the wall in a painterly manner. [Fig. 1] (Weiner also produced one of the seminal artist’s books of the period in 1968, Statements, which consisted of a series of proposals for conceptual art projects.) Kosuth,

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8 Ibid., 41.
on the other hand, approached language as sculptural material, such as in his 1965 work *Five Words in Green Neon*, in which the artist shaped words out of neon tubing that described linguistically the form which his object took on. [Fig. 2]

Yet there were also artists active during this period who sought to incorporate language into their artistic practice outside of the confines of the gallery space. Rather than use language as distinctly visual material, artists such as Dan Graham and Robert Smithson turned to writing as a means to further explore areas of inquiry first established in their visual practice. While many Conceptual artists were now publishing books, Graham and Smithson stand out for their distinctly literary interests, embodying the figure of the artist-writer in new ways while distinguishing themselves from artists who used the book as a visual medium. Graham and Smithson’s texts push LeWitt’s dictum regarding the use of words in an artwork to an extreme, exposing the vague nature of his language and making the viewer (or reader) question whether an apparent work of literature can dually function as a work of art.

Dan Graham’s early experiments in language-based work, such as his 1966 project *Schema*, demonstrate an aesthetic interest in systems and seriality in line with Conceptual and Minimal art’s broader thematic tendencies. For *Schema*, Graham wrote a series of “poems” which delineate the quantitative structure of a given page of a publication, typically a magazine, as the artist adheres to a strict system to reveal the numeric facts of a given text that typically go unrecognized by the reader (such as the number of adjectives used, the name of the typeface, the thinness of the paper). [Fig. 3] Each poem is then placed in the magazine that serves as its subject, allowing the work to refer to its own materiality. As Graham notes, “Placing work in the context of the magazine page allowed it to be read in juxtaposition to art criticism, art reviews,
and art magazine reproductions of art objects installed in exhibition spaces.”¹⁰ In line with Lewitt’s definition of Conceptual art, the results produced by Schema are trivial; rather, the crucial aspect of Schema proves to be the intricate system designed by Graham to construct each poem. The texts derived from this system bare little resemblance to conventional poetry, but instead reveal how both the form and function of poetry change when approached as a Conceptual project.

However, Graham would soon express a desire to move beyond the largely self-referential aims of Conceptualism, beginning with his 1967 text “Homes for America.” [Fig. 4] Rather than analyzing the magazine article as subject, as the artist did in Schema, “Homes for America” uses the magazine article as its medium. Published in Arts Magazine, “Homes for America” considers the serial, systematic nature of postwar suburban housing developments in the U.S., thereby revealing the conceptual similarities between the construction of these housing projects and the work of many Conceptual and Minimalist artists active at the time. The text is accompanied by photographs taken by Graham which document the architectural styles he describes. Graham writes in a rather dry, investigative style, detailing the limited aesthetic variations and general monotony of his subject in a straightforward manner. “Homes for America” sought to apply the aesthetic principles of Conceptualism and Minimalism to a field outside the realm of art, as Graham considers—unlike a majority of artists working within this milieu—the possible societal applications of the highly serial and systematic work being produced at this juncture.

Certainly more literary in nature than Schema or the language-based works of Weiner and Kosuth, “Homes for America” serves as an example of essayistic work that transcends mere

¹⁰ Dan Graham, “Media Study: Dan Graham,” Artforum vol. 51 (September 2012), 114.
criticism or supplementary writing. The text is considered a respective component of Graham’s broader artistic practice, as its inclusion in a magazine derives from the same impulse that triggered the rise of the artist’s book: a desire for new mediums through which ideas could be presented and circulated. Additionally, it is crucial to consider how, in Graham’s words, “the text functions in relation to/modifying the meaning of the photos,” as both the text and the accompanying photographs “represent’ the serial logic of the housing developments whose subject matter the article is about.”

According to LeWitt’s belief that “if words are used, and they proceed from ideas about art, then they are art and not literature,” “Homes for America” certainly constitutes a work of art, as it reflects the period’s prevailing aesthetic concerns in both form and content. While LeWitt’s dictum deserves scrutiny, and certainly does not represent a principle of language’s relationship to visual art, it serves to contextualize how language-based works by visual artists were being considered at this moment.

Contemporaneously to Graham, Robert Smithson published a series of articles in art magazines which, similarly to “Homes for America,” extend the artist’s aesthetic concerns to the magazine page. Rather than review an exhibition or provide a critical reading of the work of a contemporary—as artists with a penchant for writing and occasionally assuming the guise of the critic were frequently hired to do—Smithson opted to write a number of formally inventive texts which reflect new methods of engagement with the larger themes of his artistic practice, namely entropy and monumentality. One of these texts, “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey,” published in Artforum in 1967, is best described as a work of impressionistic journalism. Chronicling a trip by bus from New York City to Passaic, Smithson first summarizes his reading

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material during the journey, providing a visual analysis of a painting he comes across in the *New York Times*. Smithson then narrates his walking “tour” along the Passaic River, where the artist photographs and analyzes various “monuments” he encounters along the way. However, these monuments are merely the functional, industrial structures that have been placed in or alongside the river. Smithson provides his impressions of these man-made objects—which include a bridge, a pumping derrick, and a sandbox—noting their resemblance to “prehistoric creatures trapped in the mud, or better, extinct machines—mechanical dinosaurs stripped of their skin.”

But the artist not only reflects upon the formal and aesthetic nature of these monuments; he ultimately considers how these structures, and the city of Passaic as a whole, represent the thwarted promises of utopianism, leaving suburban America in a state of entropy. Smithson writes, “Passaic seems full of ‘holes’ compared to New York City, which seems tightly packed and solid, and those holes in a sense are the monumental vacancies that define, without trying, the memory-traces of an abandoned set of futures. Such futures are found in grade B Utopian films, and then imitated by the suburbanite.”

Influenced by science fiction novels, from which the artist cites frequently in his texts, Smithson employs sophisticated yet playful language evocative of the genre to put themes relating to his practice, such as entropy and the natural environment, in conversation with both utopian and dystopian visions of the future.

While the genres of Smithson’s texts range from travelogues to more experimental forms (such as “Strata: A Geophotographic Fiction,” his scattershot overview of various geological periods and their attributes), at the core of the artist’s written output is an exploration of the unique possibilities which language affords the artist. Smithson specifies the nature of these

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13 Ibid., 55.
possibilities in his 1968 text “A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art,” in which he writes, “In the illusory babels of language, an artist might advance specifically to get lost, and to intoxicate himself in dizzying syntaxes, seeking odd intersections of meaning, strange corridors of history, unexpected echoes, unknown humors, or voids of knowledge…but this quest is risky, full of bottomless fictions and endless architectures and counter-architectures.”

Enacting the disorientation he seeks in this very sentence, Smithson approaches writing not as a practice distinct from visual art, but rather as one that corresponds with the direction in which art was trending at this moment, when the concepts behind an artist’s work were oftentimes given more consideration than the visual phenomena of their objects. Yet employing literature as medium proves particularly potent when the artist situates “the illusory babels of language” as the subject of their ruminations—a potency which increases exponentially when the artist in question possesses the linguistic faculties of Smithson, whose texts reflect the same sense of monumentality and wonder that have canonized the artist’s earthworks. [Fig. 5]

Art critic Craig Owens would expand upon this notion in his 1979 essay “Earthwords,” in which he writes:

If this collection of Smithson’s writings testifies to anything in our present culture, it is to the eruption of language into the field of visual arts, and the subsequent decentering of that field—a decentering in which these texts themselves play a crucial part…‘A Museum of Language’ describes what is perhaps the most significant displacement of all—that of art from the visual to the verbal field.

Using words such as decentering and displacement, Owens suggests that the proliferation of forms which engage with language and writing in the 1960s—artists’ books, interdisciplinary magazine articles, off-kilter critical texts—was in fact part of a larger tectonic shift which

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15 Craig Owens, “Earthwords,” October no. 10 (Fall 1979), 122-123.
occurred alongside (or perhaps as a result of) Conceptual art. Invoking art’s transition from modernism to postmodernism, Owens argues:

> What I am proposing…is that the eruption of language into the aesthetic field—an eruption signalled by, but by no means limited to, the writings of Smithson, Morris, Andre, Judd, Flavin, Rainer, LeWitt—is coincident with, if not the definitive index of, the emergence of postmodernism. This ‘catastrophe’ disrupted the stability of a modernist partitioning of the aesthetic field into discrete areas of specific competence; one of its most deeply felt shocks dislodged literary activity from the enclaves into which it had settled only to stagnate—poetry, the novel, the essay…and dispersed it across the entire spectrum of aesthetic activity.\(^\text{16}\)

In proposing that the “eruption of language into the aesthetic field” signifies a new epoch in art history—one that corresponds with widespread changes across culture—Owens claims the modernist tendency to “confine the artist within the sharply delineated boundaries of a single aesthetic discipline”\(^\text{17}\) to be passé and no longer tenable. Owens recognizes a levelling of (and the increased merging of) artistic disciplines, as well as the introduction of literary, language-based work into the purview of art discourse, which historically privileged strictly visual artistic mediums.

The production of literary work by artists was certainly not a new phenomenon in the sixties. Wassily Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich, two major painters of the Russian avant-garde, published a number of influential theoretical texts in the 1910s and 20s which served to delineate and reinforce their aesthetic ideals. While certain Abstract Expressionist painters such as Ad Reinhardt wrote theoretical texts about their own work and that of their contemporaries in the 1950s, artists and critics of the movement generally considered creative writing as a practice wholly distinct from visual art. Thus, texts written by artists during the modernist period demonstrate a stark difference in approach to those by Graham and Smithson. As Owens argues,

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 126-127.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 125.
“For the modernist artist…writing was not an alternative medium for aesthetic practice; through it, work might be explained, but never produced.”18 The writings of modernist artists are generally intended to be read as ancillary to the visual work they refer to, acting as literary supplements that serve to clarify the methods and aesthetic convictions of the artist. This notion is expanded upon by critic Brian Wallis, who writes:

[Modernist] artists were insistently represented and mythologized as visual rather than intellectual, their writings serving to supplement or extend the increasingly “pure” representations of their artwork. The writings of artists such as Kasimir Malevich, Piet Mondrian, and Wassily Kandinsky, for example, were predominantly aesthetic and philosophical in nature, reinforcing the nearly sacred quest of modern artists toward the idealization of abstraction and steering them away from the concreteness and materiality by which language might bind art to everyday experience.19

Graham’s “Homes for America” and Smithson’s “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey” are examples of texts which, contrary to Wallis’ description of the writings of Malevich, Mondrian, and Kandinsky, seek out the “concreteness and materiality by which language might bind art to everyday experience” that modernism’s devout commitment to abstraction avoided. Writings by artists of the modernist period typically served as mere theoretical reinforcement for the aesthetic concerns of an artist or a movement, something that Owens argues is a product of the modernist tendency to partition artistic disciplines, especially along the lines of visual versus verbal. Modernist artists who chose to write at all generally wrote about their visual work, or the work of their contemporaries; what sets artists such as Smithson and Graham apart is their ambition to write in a manner which produces a distinctly aesthetic experience, one that relates formally and thematically to the artist’s visual practice.

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18 Ibid., 127.
While sharing similar thematic concerns regarding language and its aesthetic possibilities, Graham and Smithson expanded upon the aims of Conceptualists who were experimenting with language in the gallery context (such as Weiner and Kosuth) by approaching literature more directly and appropriating its forms. Their use of the magazine article as medium also distinguishes Graham and Smithsons’ literary work from distributable projects such as Graham’s *Schema* or Weiner’s *Statements*, which engaged with literature in an obscure and decidedly non-literary manner (due in large part to their strict adherence to Conceptualism’s systematic tendencies and deadpan tone). Graham and Smithson approached discursive and essayistic writing genres through formally inventive means, maintaining a belief that these forms proved worthy mediums for expressing their artistic ideas. While many Conceptual artists were now publishing books, Graham and Smithsons’ written work turned the modernist understanding of the artist-writer binary into a notion of the artist as writer, as these artists were able to express thematic and formal ideas associated with their visual practice through literature. The notion of the artist as writer is one that would persist from the Conceptual moment until the present day, throughout what will be referred to as the postmodern period. To demonstrate this phenomenon, I will use the framework laid out by Owens in “Earthwords,” in which postmodernism denotes the era when modernism’s partitioning of aesthetic fields no longer withholds, as artists begin to work within previously unexplored (including non-visual) modes of artistic expression.

What I will now turn my focus towards is a phenomenon within the postmodern emergence of the artist as writer. A natural byproduct of artists more frequently employing writing as a mode of expression, the post-Conceptual moment saw a rise in artists interested in fiction as form and the novel as medium. With New York City as the focal point of my inquiry, I will consider how the figure of the artist as writer has evolved from the Conceptual period of the
late sixties to the present moment, characterized by the omnipresence of digital media. But first, I will examine an early experiment in the artist’s novel and consider how and why the form proliferated in the twenty-first century.

Part II: Artist as Novelist

A number of modernist artists, including Giorgio de Chirico, Salvador Dalí, and Yayoi Kusama, attempted to write novels at some point in their careers; however, a distinction can be made between novels written by artists who decided to try their hand at literature and wrote autonomous pieces of fiction, detached from the artist’s visual practice (as did de Chirico, Dalí, and Kusama), and the artist’s novel as medium. The artist’s novel, which did not become a named phenomenon until the twenty-first century, denotes novels written by visual artists that are integrated into the artist’s general practice and oeuvre, and embody an idea generated by an artistic inquiry. The Book Lovers, a research project initiated by artist David Maroto and art historian Joanna Zieślińska, has worked to distinguish the medium within art discourse since 2011, studying “how a literary genre such as the novel becomes a medium in the visual arts,” an inquiry based on their assertion that “in recent years an increasing number of artists have begun to integrate their novels as a fundamental part of their visual art projects.” Among the set of ways in which Maroto and Zieślińska define the artist’s novel, they claim, “The artist’s novel is a medium in the visual arts. The artist employs the novel exactly as video or performance, for example. The artist’s novel is dependent on the structure of a novel. Even though it might relate to a literary tradition, it is produced in the context of the visual arts.”

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example of a novel which straddles the oftentimes vague border between artist’s novel and mere novel by visual artist is Andy Warhol’s *a.*

*a: A Novel*, published by Grove Press in 1968, contains the typo-filled transcripts of what is purportedly twenty-four hours in the life of Ondine, an actor and friend of Warhol’s who appeared in a number of the artist’s films. Devoid of narration, the novel consists strictly of dialogue between a rotating cast of characters, the product of Warhol’s incessant tape recording of Ondine during a few days over a two-year period between 1965 and 1967. The content of the dialogue is largely characterized by amphetamine-fueled hysteria, as Warhol’s “characters” (whose names are usually variations on the real names of the members of Warhol’s circle they represent) digress from art world gossip to particularities of drug and food intake. In her book *Andy Warhol, Publisher*, art historian Lucy Mulroney details Warhol’s motives for producing *a*, writing, “The impetus for the novel, Warhol recalled, was provided by a friend who had written him a note saying: ‘Everybody we knew was writing a book, so that made me want to keep up and do one too. So I bought a tape recorder and I taped the most interesting person I know at the time, Ondine, for a whole day.’”22 The compulsive nature of *a*’s genesis is reflected in the haphazardness of the text itself, as typos, inconsistencies in format, and confusions regarding which character is speaking abound. These inconsistencies can largely be ascribed to the fact that once Warhol had completed the taping, the artist hired four separate typists to transcribe his recordings, with the typists each using different methods to format the text and attribute each line of dialogue.

Regarding the disorder of the novel and its apparent editing mistakes, Mulroney notes that “[Editor Arnold] Leo remembers [Warhol and collaborator Billy Name] saying, during

Warhol’s meeting with Grove Press: ‘Why do we want to correct all this stuff? Isn’t that what makes it real, that all these mistakes are here?…The typists’ mistakes are all part of the process of creating a novel…The manuscript should be reproduced the way it is.’”

While a shares little in common with the conventional, mainstream novel, eschewing narration and the notion that the author must write (or type) the text with their own hand, literary critic Paul Benzon argues that a “performs the problematic of the typewriter in its mode of production,” a formal strategy that thematically aligns the novel with much of Warhol’s oeuvre. Akin to Warhol’s filmic work (such as Empire [1964], which consists of one unchanging eight-hour shot of the Empire State Building), a contains a distinctly durational nature that emphasizes the fabrication inherent to its method of production. Warhol published a novel not to enact a distinctly literary experience, but to filter the novel as medium through his particular and established artistic practice. However, a was published at a moment when experimentation with textual form was a popular trend in postmodern literature, as a diverse range of styles and genres were frequently being placed in the context of the novel, lending to the medium’s exceedingly fragmented nature in the postwar era.

To this point, Benzon writes:

“With its disjointed, syntactically difficult narrative, its thematic concern with information technology, and its technological mode of production, a sits at the intersection of two artistic trends of the late twentieth century, namely, the discursive, formal, and ontological play of high postmodernist fiction and the reproductive, found-art images of postmodern pop artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg, and Warhol himself.”

a seems to contain all of the elements of the artist’s novel as it is conceived of today, as Warhol employed the novel to create a medium-specific variation on a major theme of his artistic

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23 Ibid., 75.
25 Ibid., 98.
practice—the foregrounding and critiquing of methods of production—while putting in question literary conventions such as authorship and fiction.

Warhol’s novel functions more as a work of art than a work of literature, as the artist largely foregoes any semblance of narrative and gives minimal consideration to notions of coherence and readability. Assuming the written word as his form, Warhol evades the modernist tendency to write about one’s visual work and instead enacts a conceptually dense process through the medium of the novel. However, as art critic Maria Fusco notes, Warhol’s novel was not given the same acknowledgement by critics and scholars as his visual work received—a common phenomenon among early artists’ novels. In her essay “How Hard It is to Die: Towards Artists’ Novels,” Fusco writes:

The lack of visibility and subsequent dissemination of such early artists’ novels by practitioners as famous as Dalí, [Carl] Andre, and Warhol, whose visual work is familiar to even a non-specialist audience, is a curious facet of artists’ writings. Their novels were never known. One might suggest that this is because of the avant-garde nature of the books. I would contest this by suggesting that...the real reason for their lack of presence was that they were not received as a ‘legal’ element of a visual artist’s oeuvre.26

Despite the shared concerns of the novel’s emphasis on process and duration with that of Warhol’s visual work, a remains largely outside of the purview of the artist’s canon. While, at the time, neither Warhol nor Grove Press had the vocabulary or framework to explicitly market a as an artist’s novel, the neglect which the book was met with upon publication and its sustained obscurity exemplifies the modernist tendency to “confine the artist within the sharply delineated boundaries of a single aesthetic discipline,” which Craig Owens argues is “sanctioned by an unquestioned belief in the absolute difference of verbal and visual art.”27

27 Craig Owens, “Earthwords,” October no. 10 (Fall 1979), 125-126.
While it is now apparent that Owens was prescient in declaring that Conceptual and, more broadly, postmodern art would dislodge “literary activity from the enclaves into which it had settled only to stagnate” during the modernist period and disperse it “across the entire spectrum of aesthetic activity,” the critic’s contemporaries proved rather sluggish in accepting this notion. There was evidently no boom of formally transgressive literary work by artists (à la Graham and Smithson) in the final decades of the twentieth century, as those who were producing intriguing texts were met with the same treatment that befell Warhol’s foray into literature: written work was denied legitimacy as a “‘legal’ element of a visual artist’s oeuvre.” However, around the turn of the century, writing suddenly became a reinvigorated facet of artistic practice, leading to a new debate around the question of whether literary work (or work that is largely non-visual in nature) can, or should, function as a respective component of an artist's oeuvre. There are a number of factors which lead to this reassessment, but the emergence of the internet as a primary site of engagement with contemporary art seems to be the predominant force behind new considerations of medium and practice in the twenty-first century.

In recent years, the internet has generated a more connected social field in the disjointed world of contemporary art, as previously invisible (or nonexistent) networks have slowly gained visibility online, allowing for an increase in communication among the art world’s various nodes and outposts. As the most intelligible and pragmatic method of communication, language and literature have suddenly become fields of expanded possibilities, as the internet provides drastically new forums for producing and engaging with written texts. While the rate at which artists in the twenty-first century are writing more than previous generations of artists is unclear,

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28 Cited on p. 11.
29 Cited on p. 17.
what is evident is that artists are more frequently integrating their writing into their overall practice, a product of new methods of distribution made available by the internet. Rather than go through the work of self-publishing a book or trying to get a piece published in a magazine, artists now have a plethora of channels through which they can circulate texts amongst peers and followers, with artists increasingly experimenting with the potentialities of these channels.

While the internet has established altogether new mediums of artistic production, the internet also functions as a mass archive for artistic work of both past and present, allowing work to reach new viewers throughout the world. However, when represented online, all artworks that have been produced in actual space and exist as three-dimensional objects are effectively flattened into images (whether moving or still)—a phenomenon which has provoked a decrease in the importance of the specificity of medium, triggering what critic John Kelsey refers to as the “post-medium condition” of contemporary art. Thus, the increase in artists’ writings in the twenty-first century can be regarded as an explicit response to art’s post-medium condition in the information age. As a form of expression which resists being transformed into an image, writing provides artists with the opportunity to reflect upon the contemporary moment outside of the economy of images, as literature remains a medium that is incongruous to many of the tendencies of art in our hyper-digital environment (immediacy, sensuousness, fluidity of form). Artists’ writings often remain online and assume various forms native to the internet, including blog posts, tweets, and PDFs; however, amidst all of the discursive content available on the internet, artists have increasingly returned to a rather archaic medium—the novel. Writing a novel provides artists with the opportunity to assess and address the contemporary moment in a form that requires even more time and attention than literature read online. Furthermore, working

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within fiction generally allows artists to incorporate a higher degree of play and world-building in their texts than strictly essayistic or nonfictional forms. While the artist’s novel represents only one element of the larger phenomenon of artists’ writings in contemporary art, the medium carries historical weight and has evolved over centuries of practice, making it a ripe form for artistic inquiry. Though there have been countless novels written by visual artists in the past two decades, I’ll be considering two notable examples, published in 2005 and 2015 respectively, which each provoke intriguing arguments for why the artist’s novel is an important medium for contemporary art in the present moment and going forward.\(^{31}\)

Chapter One

On Bernadette Corporation’s *Reena Spaulings*

In 2005, the New York-based artists’ collective Bernadette Corporation published their novel *Reena Spaulings* through the independent publisher Semiotext(e). The novel’s loose narrative depicts the rise of its titular character and protagonist from security guard to supermodel, an evolution which coincides with the development of Reena’s revolutionary proclivities. The strange amalgam of high fashion and leftist politics found in *Reena Spaulings* is emblematic of Bernadette Corporation’s highly idiosyncratic artistic practice, in which the group employs the imagery of fashion editorial to critique capitalism, albeit in ways that sometimes seem to convey an admiration for the aesthetics of consumerism. *Reena Spaulings* is notable for its method of production, in which the novel’s narrative was outlined by Bernadette Corporation’s core members, who then assigned a multitude of writers and artists particular passages to write before editing these contributions together. The peculiar process by which *Reena Spaulings* was created provokes the following questions: how does one judge a novel whose only identifiable author is a corporation? How does this experience differ from the typical experience of reading a novel? And how, if at all, does this mode of production and authorship provide new potentialities for the novel as medium?

On a number of levels, Bernadette Corporation invokes a crisis of identification on the part of the art historian. For starters: the name. While “Bernadette” comes from Bernadette Van-Huy, the group’s figurehead, to label oneself—even a collective body—a *corporation* seems to defy every inclination of a politically charged, leftist-based art practice. Formed during the rise of the anti-globalization movement, which targeted multinational corporations as primary actors in perpetuating global economic stratification, it is easy to characterize Bernadette Corporation’s
name as a basic act of subversion. However, when considering the definition of corporation stripped from its connotations—“a large company or group of companies authorized to act as a single entity and recognized as such in law”\textsuperscript{32}—one finds that the title in fact serves as a viable descriptor of how BC has functioned since its inception. In a manifesto-like text published in the literary fashion magazine \textit{Purple Prose} in 1997, Bernadette Corporation discloses the process by which the group formed while justifying the act of incorporation, writing, “Mock incorporation is quick and easy, no registration or fees, simply choose a name…and spend a lot of time together. Ideas will come later. The perfect alibi for not having to fix an identity, your corporate image can be simply, ‘man, we’re a corporation.’”\textsuperscript{33} While their name conveys a considerable degree of irony, such particular consideration of nomenclature proves emblematic of the group’s work, as language functions as an integral aspect of Bernadette Corporation’s aesthetic practice.

A product of the twenty-first century urge to \textit{produce content}, Bernadette Corporation has resisted being pigeonholed into a specific medium or movement throughout its existence by using every form at their disposal in the age of new media. However, the field most often associated with BC is the world in which the group began—fashion. The origin story of Bernadette Corporation is one that has been told countless times with a number of variations, though it tends to go something like this: in 1993, Bernadette Van-Huy, a Vietnamese-American Queens native who had just received an economics degree from Brown University, was asked to host a weekly club night at Club USA in Times Square. While the club night would last only a few weeks, the group assembled by Van-Huy to plan and promote her parties bonded over a shared interest in avant-garde fashion and design. The group, which comprised of four core


members at this stage—Van-Huy, Thuy Pham, Sonny Pak, and Antek Walczak—soon began designing clothes, developing the brand name Bernadette Corporation and staging a series of fashions shows in the mid-to-late 90s. These shows are notable for their performative nature, with each show exhibiting a unique and conceptually rigorous aesthetic theme.

Bernadette Corporations’s relationship to fashion during this period was both parodic and pointed, as the group developed a practice which mixed the visual language of haute couture with streetwear to critique the fashion world’s elitism and homogeneity. BC collections oftentimes consisted of both variations on high-end luxury design and riffs on the distinct styles of New York City’s minority groups and subcultures. The culmination of Bernadette Corporation as fashion brand came in 1997 with their collection “Hell on Earth,” which combined a number of visual referents (Michael Jackson, streetwear, the Japanese motorcycle-based subculture Bōsōzoku) in an evocative, dimly lit fashion show. [Fig. 6] The text included in the program to the “Hell on Earth” fashion show (likely written by Antek Walczak, the resident theorist of the group at this juncture) demonstrates a penchant towards grandiose narrative building and fictionalization, a characteristic that would later be fully fleshed out by BC in *Reena Spaulings*. With a distinctly apocalyptic bent, the “Hell on Earth” text recounts a series of recent historical events that have contributed to the “spiritual crisis of today,” declaring that “the deteriorating cultural condition outlined above signals the end of Bernadette CORPORATION as we know it. It has enabled a war that is currently being waged within the company.”

The text then details a fictional conflict that jeopardizes the future of Bernadette Corporation—an alleged “war” between two opposing factions of the group, the Monkey Clan and Butt Thugg, who diverge along both aesthetic and political lines. The text ends by announcing that “the fashion show you

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are about to witness is a product of this turmoil,”35 positioning “Hell on Earth,” through the creation of an absurd narrative, as the result of what seemed to have been genuine dissent within the group. “Hell on Earth” would prove to be the final fashion show and collection produced by Bernadette Corporation, prompting a short lull in activity, followed by a reshuffling of the group’s members.

Regarding the aims of the group at this early stage, Bernadette Van-Huy reflects, “Our practices belonged to art, but we enacted them in the fashion world. This was about breaking out of the gallery and into more popular, mainstream spaces.”36 While their proximity to fashion would fluctuate, this desire to “break out” of the gallery space has remained a constant throughout BC’s work, as the group uses their status as faux “corporation” to enact a number of interventions outside of the art world’s confines. In 1999, the two remaining members of Bernadette Corporation, Van-Huy and Walczak, were joined by artist and critic John Kelsey, and the trio began editing Made in USA, a magazine named after the 1966 Jean-Luc Godard film of the same name. Equal parts fashion, arts, and literary magazine, three issues of Made in USA were published between 1999 and 2001. These issues contain a diverse array of content, including fashion editorial, art photography, film reviews, interviews, prose pieces (of both fiction and theory), and translations of previously untranslated texts by Serge Daney and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Both Kelsey and Walczak contributed essays to the magazine, while a number of artists and writers outside the group were commissioned to write texts. Placing content native to the popular magazine format alongside discursive, theoretical texts, Made in USA not only...

35 Ibid.
reflects, but reflects upon the conventions of fashion magazines, allowing the publication to serve as a curatorial space where both the breadth of BC’s practice and their distinct critical standpoint are put on display. To this point, art historian Tom Holert argues, “The criticality of Made in USA is attained through the unresolved tension between a desire for radical politics and a commitment to the not necessarily theoretical, visual-practical understanding of the modes of production of the very imagery organizing consumerist wishes.” With Made in USA, Bernadette Corporation employed the magazine page as a space to both revel in and critique the fashion industry, an industry which critic Chris Kraus claims acts as “a template or mirror of the cultural industry at large.”

The collaborative process of Made in USA, in which its editors hauled in an array of contributors of various vocations to the magazine, led to an expansion of Bernadette Corporation’s membership in the early aughts. The fluid nature of Bernadette Corporation’s lineup lends to the idea that BC exists less as a fixed, closed group of artists and more as a generated identity for a loose social network—the guise under which the products of a pointed groupthink are released into both the market and the discourse, no matter the specificities of that group. (In this sense, BC functions very much like a corporation.) Actor Jim Fletcher and artist Jutta Koether, for instance, who respectively wrote texts for issues 1 and 3 of Made in USA, would subsequently play important roles in the production of Reena Spaulings in the years following the final issue of Made in USA. Thus, the act of social networking necessitated by the publication of Made in USA, as well as the intrinsically collaborative nature of the magazine

format, would prove to inform BC’s process of assembling writers for their next publication, the novel *Reena Spaulings*.

Bernadette Corporation spent much of 2004 working on *Reena Spaulings*, undertaking a distinctive writing process which serves as a key part of the novel’s existence. BC makes the specificities of this process clear in the novel’s preface:

> 150 writers, professional and amateur, have contributed to [the novel], not using the mutually blind exquisite corpse method, and not using the “may I have this dance” method where writers take turns being the author, but using the old Hollywood screenwriting system whereby a studio boss had at his disposal a “stable” of writers working simultaneously to crank out a single blockbuster, each assigned specific functions within the overall scheme.\(^{39}\)

While totaling the number of contributors to *Reena Spaulings* at 150 may or may not be an exaggeration, this passage describes an organized, cohesive mode of production whereby a vast array of artists each play a respective role in a broader scheme, working towards a formulated and mutually understood objective established by Bernadette Corporation’s core members. This specific writing process allows for the distinct stylistic tendencies of each writer to stand out while the conceptual and thematic underpinnings of the project remain intact. Critic Bennett Simpson, writing while the novel was in progress, further clarifies the mechanisms of this process, reporting that “an editorial team, including artist Jutta Koether and actor/poet Jim Fletcher, have conceived a general framework of chapters, which are being written by some twenty collaborators over many months before being assembled into a finished narrative.”\(^{40}\)

While, in the first place, Bernadette Corporation exists as an elusively dispersed collective (the group virtually never delineates the contributors of any given work, and their website withholds any information regarding BC’s membership), *Reena Spaulings* amplifies the effects of the

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group’s mystique by employing anywhere between twenty to 150 collaborators to write a novel—a medium that historically privileges single authorship.

In his essay “BC Books,” written on the occasion of Bernadette Corporation’s 2012 retrospective at New York gallery Artists Space, BC member Jim Fletcher reflects upon the writing process of *Reena Spaulings*, noting, “It was approached via questions like how big should it be? What should a novel look like? A backwards strategy starting with the look and feel of the finished product.” BC’s consideration of the novel first as a visual, material object subverts the primarily verbal nature of the form, as the “look” and “feel” of a novel are typically treated as afterthoughts by its author. The front cover of *Reena Spaulings* contains an ink drawing attributed to Bernadette Corporation of an assortment of random objects, attached together in a manner that resembles a Rube Goldberg machine. [Fig. 7] The title of the novel emerges from one end of the machine and cascades down the cover, a visual metaphor for the novel’s method of production: a plethora of writers gathered to form a machinelike whole, performing a task typically executed by a lone individual. The novel’s back cover eschews endorsements or plot summary, instead containing a short letter addressed to New York and signed by Reena, the novel’s protagonist, in which Reena professes her love for the city and dedicates the novel to it. By including this letter on the novel’s exterior, Bernadette Corporation immediately presents the novel’s two primary subjects, the protagonist Reena Spaulings and the city of New York, to the book’s viewer. The novel’s preface works similarly, informing the reader about the conceptual basis for *Reena Spaulings* by revealing how the novel came together and what it sets out to do before jumping into its narrative.

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The setting of *Reena Spaulings* is an at times dystopic, at times idealistic rendering of New York City; this metropolis, while constantly on the brink of disasters of unintelligible origins, seems to run on the energy generated by trendsetter and production mogul Maris Parings and her muse Reena Spaulings, two figures who seamlessly oscillate between the gate-kept art world and the mainstream-facing fashion world—an idealized cultural position which the work of Bernadette Corporation often strives for. At the start of the novel, Reena Spaulings, a young woman, works as a security guard at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Reena is treated with a distinct ambivalence by her writers, as her physical features are described in an ambiguous and contradictory manner that establishes her as a sort of “everywoman”: “Reena’s eyes are brown? Blue? Something like that. Why describe her as beautiful? She’s not. She’s pre-aesthetic…But I don’t want to make her out to be more or less or other than human, or even human.” By hedging Reena’s identity, BC establish a plot device that accounts for the inconsistencies stemming from the book’s collective authorship, including varying depictions of their protagonist. Reena Spaulings (the character, but also the novel itself) is the product of a situation in which multiple authors—connected by their involvement with Bernadette Corporation, but each with distinct experiences, subjective viewpoints, and aesthetic inclinations—impose their unique vision upon a shared character with a loosely established framework. As stated in the novel’s preface, the fluid nature of Reena Spaulings’ identity works to situate BC’s protagonist as “more of a material entity, a being, than a character,” as “her thoughts and actions are not spanned by any author’s mind.”

While at Waste—a post-apocalyptic nightclub replete with skate ramp, private tunnels, video installations, and murals, which Reena points out are painted in the style of late career

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43 Ibid., v.
Francis Picabia—Reena Spaulings meets Maris Parings, a “rising culture-preneur” who
produces, among other things, fashion editorials and the “silent club-films” shown on Waste’s
video monitors.44 A Warholian figure, Maris maintains a stable of attractive young people who,
through constant exposure and the cultivation of persona, are carefully molded into underground
celebrities. After spotting Reena at Waste, Maris becomes infatuated, and the two party together.
The following day, Maris pays Reena a visit at the Met and requests that she participate in a
fashion shoot she is organizing for an underwear campaign, believing that Reena’s “gawky,
asymmetrical physique, day-old-bread skin (blemishes included), and somewhat lost-looking
face” will “speak to a generation long numbed by swollen breasts and lips, jutting hips, machine-
flattened tummies and picture-perfect hair.”45 Maris believes that, by placing Reena and her
alluring sense of everywoman-ness in the position of model, the resulting images will
communicate a feeling that transcends mere consumerist impulse. Regarding the interaction
between the public and Reena’s fashion ads, Maris imagines, “It would have the energy of an
encounter, and would therefore involve people and produce a more exciting, even catastrophic
relationship between the skin and eye…But most exciting of all, we would be making that once-
in-a-generation leap into a seemingly unknown form of seduction.”46 Maris envisions Reena as a
subversive version of the It girl archetype, and her vision is spot on; the underwear campaign is a
hit, more shoots follow, and Reena becomes a star.

Though the novel spans twenty chapters and two hundred pages, Reena Spaulings
contains only a handful of consequential (or coherent) plot points. In chapter six, a tornado
ravages through New York City—a frantic scene with allusions to the World Trade Center

44 Ibid., 22.
45 Ibid., 36.
46 Ibid., 37.
attacks—but this event is not referred to again. The chapters that follow largely consist of the mundane and absurd activities of Reena and her acolytes, coupled with BC’s poetic and philosophical musings on contemporary life in New York City. In some of the novel’s more intriguing passages, BC eschews continuation of the novel’s narrative in favor of digressions on a range of topics. Just before Reena quits her job at the Met, BC provides a thorough analysis of Édouard Manet’s painting *Young Lady in 1866* (which hangs at the museum) through the eyes of Reena. [Fig. 8] Interspersed with her memories of partying with Maris at Waste the night before, BC notes Reena’s adulation for the painting while dissecting the psychological complexity conveyed in the scene, writing, “To look at this painting is to experience a situation sensuously rich and extremely suggestive, yet not real at all. A special fiction to inhabit. Another kind of performance unfolding, making room for fantasies now, and narratives full of intimacies.” Other noteworthy passages include a reflection on the relevance of the figure of the dandy in contemporary society and a two-page concrete poem about, and in the shape of, a brassiere, as BC declares that “the page is a bra for words.” [Fig. 9] The abundance of moments in *Reena Spaulings* in which the reader is taken out of the flow of the book’s narrative and confronted with critical passages relevant to art, culture, or society at large demonstrates the dual function of the novel for Bernadette Corporation, as the group uses the form as a means to both construct a fictional narrative and espouse the group’s critical and theoretical ideas.

However, as critic Emily Pethick notes in her review of the novel, “Spontaneous gang violence sparks up around the city and a virtual war zone of civil unrest creeps in, a kind of hallucinatory uprising of collective unconscious desire.” Appearing in random episodes

47 Ibid., 34.
48 Ibid., 39.
throughout the novel, this violence is more alluded to than explained—though it is clear that Reena becomes increasingly involved in the unrest, as she detonates a bomb in a juice bar in chapter twelve. It is this rebellious energy that seems to inform the novel’s climax in chapter eighteen, in which Reena’s “musical riot,” alternatively titled “Battle Over Broadway” and “Cinema of the Damned,” is performed. Conceived of following Reena’s promotion to Vice President of Vive la Corpse, Maris’s production company (a not-so-subtle caricature of Bernadette Corporation itself), the performance serves as Reena’s ultimate gesture as cultural figure, a work of art which bleeds into and disrupts everyday life. “Battle Over Broadway” is a musical production unlawfully performed in public space; when police arrive and begin detaining performers, the play turns into a full-fledged riot, as actors, continuing to perform the play’s musical numbers, are joined by the audience in a violent melee against the police that moves through Manhattan. Describing Reena amidst the chaos, BC writes, “She lost control again in Times Square. She ran toward the river. She, meaning everybody involved, meaning the riot.”

This chapter largely maintains the fragmentation present throughout the novel, with jumps in narrator and seemingly disconnected asides, making the progression of the riot difficult to fully discern. Yet the riot instigated by Reena’s performance grows in breadth and intensity, culminating in the flinging of bombs by civilians and the collapsing of bridges. The scene ends with Reena trudging through the damage, heading home to get some rest before she reassembles her performers to enact the musical again the next day.

In 2004, as the writing of Reena Spaulings was underway, Bernadette Corporation member John Kelsey opened a gallery alongside artist Emily Sundblad in the Lower East Side of Manhattan under the name Reena Spaulings Fine Art. Kelsey notes that it was a fictional gallerist

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50 Bernadette Corporation, Reena Spaulings (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005), 180.
in Situationist writer Michèle Bernstein’s 1960 novel *All The King's Horses (Tous les chevaux du roi)* who inspired him to create a fictional persona who would serve as the face of the gallery. 

Regarding his decision to translate and subsequently distribute, chapter by chapter, Bernstein’s novel as a series of pamphlets at Reena Spaulings in ’04, Kelsey writes:

> The gradual progression of Bernstein’s chapters over the course of a year produced a narrative than ran alongside that of the gallery, which was also a sort of fiction, operated by several people under a made-up name, without a business plan or any prior experience in dealing art… The appearance of the novel *Reena Spaulings* further confused the identity and meaning of the gallery, which had meanwhile served as a meeting and writing place for the book’s many authors, and which now shared its name.\(^5^1\)

Kelsey details what was “a deliberate piling up of fictions in one location,”\(^5^2\) the haphazard Reena Spaulings gallery, which now served as BC’s de facto headquarters. Bernstein’s novel—which was quickly disowned by the writer as a mere ploy to acquire funds for other Situationist ventures, such as the publication of her husband Guy Debord’s theoretical texts—also served as an inspiration for the *Reena Spaulings* novel, as *All The King’s Horses* mimicked the popular style of the romantic youth novel in the form of a roman à clef detailing the private lives of various members of the Situationist International. However, more so than the content of the novel, it was the context of its production and its subsequent disavowal that intrigued BC, as Kelsey wonders, “What can we make of a text that insists on both its own commercialism and its refusal of authorship?”\(^5^3\) While the question goes unanswered, it is apparent that BC considered this an inquiry worth further pursuit, as *Reena Spaulings* provokes similar questions regarding authorship and the artistic value of thoroughly commercial products.

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\(^{52}\) Ibid., 214.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 215.
Kelsey cites other sources of inspiration for *Reena Spaulings* as including *Gossip Girl*, a wildly popular series of “sexed-up corporate” young adult novels set in New York City in the early aughts, and *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl (Premiers matériaux pour une Théorie de la Jeune-Fille)*, a 1999 tract by the radical far-left French collective Tiqqun.\(^{54}\) In this theoretical text, Tiqqun defines the “Young-Girl” not as a necessarily feminine signifier, but as a genderless categorization which denotes “the model citizen as redefined by consumer society since World War I, in explicit response to the revolutionary menace. As such, the Young-Girl is a polar figure, orienting, rather than dominating, outcomes.”\(^{55}\) The Young-Girl represents those who, whether knowingly or not, have been modelled by capitalist society as perpetuators of the status quo, and thus as antagonists to revolution. This notion seems to inform Reena Spaulings’ status as both a “model” and an everywoman, as BC construct their protagonist in such a manner that the reader cannot formulate a particular image that constitutes Reena, but rather must envision the character as a generic “young girl.”

In addition to serving as the fictional gallerist of a brick-and-mortar gallery, the Reena Spaulings title has since been implemented as the guise under which artworks by Bernadette Corporation’s members are sometimes shown. *The Bricks* [Fig. 10], a painting attributed to Reena Spaulings from 2006, is now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art—an extreme example of Reena Spaulings’ integration into the physical space of the art world, confusing the barrier between fiction and reality. In conceiving of their protagonist not as a typical character, but as a “material entity” that exists both in literature and the material world, BC moves *Reena Spaulings* (both the novel and the character) beyond the realm of literature, placing Reena

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\(^{54}\) Ibid.

Spaulings within a larger framework that transcends the aims of conventional literature by making her identity known through material objects and physical space.

An internal document from the beginning of the novel’s writing process demonstrates the initial framework of the project and its larger conceptual aims:

PRODUCT PROFILE: the new new novel (of its time); for young (20-30) readers; not ironic, but not too sentimental (a superior kind of realism?); not too writerly (sometimes rough, plain language); however, not afraid to invent new terminology and style as it imagines a new plain language; inhabits the present world as a new world (messianic); communist (in its writing of course, but maybe also in its content); political…glamorous; juicy…easy to read.\(^{56}\)

Bernadette Corporation’s notes reflect a distinctly utopian impulse in their desire to appeal to a wide range of readers while maintaining a sense of conceptual density. BC invokes French novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet’s mid-twentieth century theory of the Nouveau Roman, or the new novel, which called for the obsolescence of conventional notions of plot, narrative, and character in favor of a striving towards “new forms for the novel, forms capable of expressing (or of creating) new relations between man and the world.”\(^{57}\) Imagining a “new new novel,” Bernadette Corporation seeks to adapt the ethos of Robbe-Grillet’s concept to the particular concerns of the twenty-first century, when artists like BC readily integrate highbrow artistic discourse with elements of popular culture—a practice which stands in contrast to the erudite nature of Robbe-Grillet’s milieu. Thus, as evidenced by notes from the novel’s production and the diverse range of texts that inspired the group, *Reena Spaulings* reflects an effort to create a literature that is artistically informed and politically motivated while retaining elements that relate to mainstream culture and appeal to the common reader.


The preface to *Reena Spaulings* establishes the novel as a work that engages with radical politics, as BC declares, “Like the authors, the New York City depicted herein finds itself constantly exposed to the urges of ‘communism’ – that is, to a chosen indifference to private property, a putting-in-common of the methods and means of urban life and language.”

However, as this quote suggests, the communism represented in *Reena Spaulings* is an abstract communism, a communism which stems from a belief in the possibilities of communal experience and action, largely detached from the historical connotations of more stringent notions of Marxism. Of course, the novel’s collective process of production serves as a representation of this communist impulse, as Emily Pethick notes that this mode of authorship subverts both “the capitalist fixation with ‘individualism’ and the art world’s need for stardom.” Yet the novel’s content also reflects an engagement with anti-capitalist ideas that seek to expose the hyper-capitalist nature of American society in the twenty-first century.

Responding to a passage from the novel in which Reena, while interviewing Karl Lagerfeld at Waste, considers the potential effects of labor in the form of “ongoing creativity” that encompasses all of one’s daily activities, theorist McKenzie Wark writes,

> For Reena Spaulings, this is a two edged sword, pointing on the one hand to the abolition of work; on the other, to the abolition of anything other than working on one's self as something one might sell. But perhaps…in the desire to pursue the commodification of the self to the bitter end, one can see the anticipations of the end of commodification itself.

Reena Spaulings, through the combination of her widespread appeal and revolutionary inclinations, embodies an essential element of Bernadette Corporation’s practice, as the group

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58 Bernadette Corporation, *Reena Spaulings* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005), vi.
seeks to put far-left political discourse in conversation with the mainstream visual language of fashion and consumer culture.

John Kelsey characterizes *Reena Spaulings* as an attempt to “say something insincere about New York after 9/11.” Kelsey writes that, post-9/11, “a patriotic ghost of the city had been installed by citizens and police alike, the war was definitely on, and anything antagonistic to the cause was branded as terrorist,” and that fiction was needed for its distinct ability to “rewrite” and “re-inhabit” the city. But what to make of Kelsey’s claim that the novel stems from insincerity? While seemingly diminishing the critical acuity of the novel, Kelsey does not mean to posit *Reena Spaulings* as devoid of meaningful intention, or negate its status as an essential element of Bernadette Corporation’s oeuvre; rather, Kelsey employs insincerity as a descriptor to delineate a quality inherent to the novel as form. Just as it is the habit of the critic or the academic to turn to the essay as the medium through which an interpretation is made or a prescription to a problem is put forward, the artist turns toward fiction as a means to explore an as of yet unrealized model of reality. The novel is a space where artists can eschew both factuality and the representational and technological limits of material reality—a possibility which distinguishes the novel from visual mediums that rely on the parameters of material reality for their existence as objects. Though there are many methods by which writers and critics seek to tether fictional texts to the real world, such as through the use of devices like metaphor and allegory, or the integration of historical figures and factual events into a fictional story, fabrication and the creation of self-contained worlds remain defining elements of the novel as form. While *Reena Spaulings* uses a number of tactics to blur the border between fiction and nonfiction—whether employing celebrities such as Karl Lagerfeld and Slavoj Žižek as

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characters, making reference to historical events such as Tommie Smith and John Carlos’s 1968 Olympics Black Power salute, or even referencing BC members John Kelsey and Jutta Koether by name—the novel is most intriguing for its utterly singular depiction of a New York City that both reflects and departs from reality.

While inspired by and representative of the effects of 9/11 on the city, *Reena Spaulings* does not attempt to diagnose New York City’s missteps post-9/11 or prescribe solutions; rather, the novel establishes a setting of expanded possibility, an embodiment of BC’s desire for the “not normal situation.” If, as *Reena Spaulings* posits (borrowing rhetoric from both the Situationists and Hardt and Negri’s influential philosophical text *Empire*), capitalism and Empire establish a “general context that not only controls each situation but, even worse, also tries to ensure that, most of the time, there is no situation,” then Bernadette Corporation’s novel demonstrates a viable form of resistance to these circumstances. *Reena Spaulings* presents an alternative world where a model is capable of inciting revolution by enacting a “not normal situation” in the shape of a large-scale artistic performance that is enacted outside of the art world, in the thick of public life. It is no surprise that *Reena Spaulings* is the most utopic work in BC’s oeuvre; the novel allows the collective the opportunity to channel their particular aesthetic and thematic concerns into a medium that has no bounds besides language, creating a work that is both comprehensive and complex in its presentation of a world that functions according to the point-of-view of Bernadette Corporation.

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63 Ibid., 136.
Chapter Two

On Seth Price’s *Fuck Seth Price*

In 2015, after a year-long “hiatus” from the art world in which he “shut down the studio, stopped making saleable works, said no to shows,”64 artist Seth Price published a book titled *Fuck Seth Price*. On the front cover of the first edition, published by the obscure The Leopard Press (run by Price alongside frequent collaborators Wade Guyton and Bettina Funcke), the book’s flagrantly self-denigrating title is accompanied by a subtitle: *A Novel*. In providing this additional bit of introductory material to the book’s exterior, Price proclaims that the contents of his book coalesce to form a *novel*—not a memoir, nor an essay, no matter how much the text might seem like either one of these forms depending on the passage. *Fuck Seth Price*, while including a thin narrative about the exploits of an unnamed protagonist, primarily addresses the contemporary moment in art and culture at large, circling around the question of how meaning is cultivated in the face of the flattening effects of the internet and digital technology. Yet the novel also serves as a channel through which Price reflects on his own artistic practice, as the artist both critiques his past work and thinks through ideas that will inform his practice going forward. The confluence of genres and discursive modes, hybridization of fictional and memoiristic elements, and narrative ambiguity found in *Fuck Seth Price* synthesize to create an experiment in literary form that functions as both a work of literature and an artistic gesture, one meant to build upon and manipulate the collective understanding of the artist known as Seth Price.

Since his career as an artist began shortly after the turn of the century, Price has consistently demonstrated a knack for producing intriguing literary work. In 2002, Price self-

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published the initial version of “Dispersion,” a sprawling art historical essay advocating for the emergence of circuitous, primarily digital distribution networks as the new arena for radicality in artistic production. In “Dispersion,” Price defines distributed media as “social information circulating in theoretically unlimited quantities in the common market, stored on or accessed via portable means such as books and magazines, records and compact discs, videotapes and DVDs, or personal computers and mobile devices.” As the production and dissemination of these products is largely handled by monopolizing corporations with commercial interests, Price argues that portable and distributable mediums represent “space into which the work of art must project itself lest it be outdistanced entirely by these corporate interests. New strategies are needed to keep up with commercial distribution, decentralization, and dispersion.” In “Dispersion,” Price calls for greater engagement among artists with mediums such as the book, the magazine, and the CD, as these distributable objects function simultaneously in the art world as “art gestures” and as consumer items in the marketplace, hypothetically reaching a larger and more diverse audience than the conventional gallery work.

While “Dispersion” is dynamic in its aims as a work of literature, incorporating equal parts art historical inquiry, criticism, and manifesto-like proclamations, the text is equally notable for how it was distributed by Price, generating a context in which “Dispersion” is often considered a work of art unto itself. Price distributed “Dispersion” (of which multiple versions exist, as Price continued to edit the text after its initial publication) in a number of formats, including free PDF files, print publications, and as the primary material for Price’s 2008

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66 Ibid.
sculpture *Essay with Knots* [Fig. 11], demonstrating the kind of dissemination of forms which the text itself calls for. As Price notes:

The “Dispersion” piece…ended up functioning as an essay, but also as an example of what it, itself, was proposing. Positioning a piece of writing as artwork puts a doubling at the heart of the thing…The “Dispersion” essay can be read as a “straight” art historical essay…or you can take it as an artwork that uses the art historical essay as a form, but also carries a performative dimension, in which case it becomes more nuanced.  

As evidenced both by the contents of Price’s essay and the multitude of ways in which the text was distributed, “Dispersion” blurs the conventional boundaries between the work of literature and the work of art, a balancing act which would be used as a model for Price’s later forays into literary work.

In 2014, amidst the artist’s aforementioned hiatus from the art world, Price continued to pursue his practice in artistic mediums which function primarily outside the realm of the white cube. In addition to making music—a medium which Price has worked in throughout his career, experimenting with various genres and releasing a number of his compositions both digitally and in LP and CD formats—the artist attempted to write a young adult novel. Seemingly an ironic pursuit for a critically successful artist, Price explains his fascination with the YA genre in *Fuck Seth Price*, as the artist is intrigued by the idea that the majority of young adult novels are “critically dismissed with the same terms once leveled at avant-garde art: incoherent, silly, reliant on cheap effects, lacking relatable psychological qualities, cynical, and confused.”

While ultimately abandoning the YA project in favor of *Fuck Seth Price*, Price’s serious critical engagement with the young adult genre illuminates the sort of radical recontextualization of form the artist was interested in during this period, as Price sought to engage in modes of production

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typically outside of the purview of visual artists. Additionally, Price claims that the question of how an artwork can provoke change in society consumed the artist’s thinking during his hiatus. Regarding the state of discontent which this question often left him in and his general disillusionment with the contemporary art world, Price writes, “I tried to bend my frustration toward something productive. At the end of my hiatus I wrote a short novel, ‘Fuck Seth Price,’ which adopted the current literary trend of autofiction.”

Autofiction is a literary genre used to categorize novels that, while clearly written in the author’s own voice and reflective of a subjective viewpoint in line with the author’s own, make no claim to truth or facts. Conflating the fictional with the autobiographical, “autofiction” has become perhaps the most fashionable literary trend of the digital age. In an interview published by the literary magazine *The Believer*, Price explains his fascination with autofiction as such:

I’d been reading contemporary literature intensively for some years, partly because I wanted to see what the current technologies were. The author/character was a technology people were using, for me it goes back to Eileen Myles calling *Chelsea Girls* a novel, or Chris Kraus’ books in the 90s, and more recently Knausgaard, and Sheila Heti, and Tao Lin, and Ben Lerner. I decided to use this because it was a current technology.

Just as Price’s visual work reflects a habitual desire to employ the newest technologies available to the artist—as in the recent photographic suite *Danny, Mila, Hannah, Ariana, Bob, Brad*, for which Price utilized “a robotic camera typically deployed for scientific research or forensic study” in order to capture countless high-definition images of small areas of skin, which were then “stitched together using satellite-imaging software, run through a 3D graphics program, and adjusted by a fashion retoucher” [Fig. 12]—Price applies a similar approach to his turn to

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71 Wall text, Seth Price: *Danny, Mila, Hannah, Ariana, Bob, Brad*, MoMA PS1, New York, NY.
literature, producing a text that feels relevant to the contemporary moment not only thematically but formally. While Price’s declared investment in contemporary literature and its current technologies points to a number of likely influences, Ben Lerner’s 2014 novel *10:04* can be read as a particularly relevant antecedent to *Fuck Seth Price*.

In *10:04*, Lerner records in the first-person both the actions and thoughts of his protagonist, whose experiences and concerns Lerner openly admits mirror his own. *10:04* contains a number of lengthy passages on art and the art world, including critical analyses of Jules Bastien-Lepage’s nineteenth-century painting *Joan of Arc*, the Marfa sculptures of Donald Judd and John Chamberlain, and Christian Marclay’s film *The Clock*. Additionally, *10:04* includes images (paintings and photographs) and Lerner’s own previously published poetry as integral parts of its narrative. However, in addition to maintaining a critical interest in both visual and literary art forms, Lerner and Price share an overarching thematic concern for the interconnectedness of life in the digital age. Throughout the novel, Lerner’s protagonist experiences a series of episodes of agnosia, triggered by the “sudden integration” of space and time, “as when a Ugandan warlord appears via YouTube in an undocumented Salvadorean child’s Brooklyn-based dream of a future wrecked by dramatically changing weather patterns and an imperial juridical system that dooms him to statelessness.”

Sharing a similar awareness to Price of the never-quite-comprehensible totality which fragments of digital culture can momentarily coalesce to provide fleeting glimpses of, Lerner writes a fictionalized version of his own life as a means to broach critical questions regarding the subjective experience in the contemporary world. Published only a year prior to *Fuck Seth Price*, *10:04* serves as a useful correlative text to Price’s novel written by an author already ensconced in the literary world, as

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the two novels both circle around the question of the role of the artist—as well as the individual in general—in an age characterized by an overabundance of information.

In “Dispersion,” Price asks the reader to “suppose an artist were to release the work directly into a system that depends on reproduction and distribution for its sustenance, a model that encourages contamination, borrowing, stealing, and horizontal blur? The art system usually corrals errant works, but how could it recoup thousands of freely circulating paperbacks, or images of paperbacks?”73 While applying this context to the art object, Price clearly describes a situation which mirrors that of the publishing world in the digital age, when downloadable copies of countless books, both old and new, can be found circulating the internet in Portable Document Format. Unlike the art market, which fetishizes exclusivity and the signature of the artist, literature is dependent on widespread distribution and accessibility. It seems that much of Price’s interest in literature stems from the demand for maximum distribution native to the field. This is evident in the artist’s willingness to both publish—and in turn commodify—his work, as well as distribute it for free in digital form. In addition to being printed and sold as a consumer product through the standard method of publication, *Fuck Seth Price* is available as a free, downloadable PDF on the artist’s website, as is the rest of Price’s literary output.74

Yet for Price, this distribution tactic is not specific to literature: on a number of occasions, and in a number of different mediums, the artist has released the same artwork in both limited and widely available formats. In 2006, the artist made his video work *Digital Video Effect: Editions* available as a relatively cheap, unlimited edition DVD via distribution platform Electronic Arts Intermix, while also converting the video to 16mm film and producing rare

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74 An archive of Price’s literary work is available at http://www.sethpricestudio.com/writingarchive.html.
editions of the work for sale at collectors’ price under the title Untitled Film/Left. [Fig. 13] Price has since added another layer to his approach to film distribution, making all of his videos available to be streamed on his website.\textsuperscript{75} While this strategy would presumably oversaturate the artist’s market and diminish the value of the work, Bernadette Corporation member and art critic John Kelsey suggests that this is to some degree the point of Price’s enterprise, as the artist seeks to produce “the intoxicating situation of an artwork hovering very closely to its own negation as it slips between formats.”\textsuperscript{76} Interested in the effects which reformatting an artwork has on its existence—its material presence, its value, its reach—Price applies this inquiry to the medium of the novel in Fuck Seth Price.

To date, Seth Price has released three editions of Fuck Seth Price. The first edition was published as a paperback with a cover design depicting a color wheel bordered by the four directions of a compass [Fig. 14]; the second and third editions, both hardcover, feature on their covers a rephotographed advertisement from The New Yorker of Price modelling apparel for the Italian fashion house Brioni. [Fig. 15] While the author’s portrait is usually found at the back of a book or in a jacket flap, Price instead situates himself as the literal face of the novel, symbolizing the revivification of the notion of the author as subject (as evidenced by the rise of autofiction) that Roland Barthes killed in 1967.\textsuperscript{77} John Kelsey provides clarification regarding the genesis of Price’s modelling stint and the artist’s decision to incorporate this image as the novel’s cover:

When Brioni asked the artist…to model for this campaign, he agreed on one condition: that the ad be placed not only in the usual fashion pages but also in those of the New Yorker magazine. At work on his “novel” at the time, Price was already angling for

\textsuperscript{75} An archive of Price’s films is available at http://www.sethpricestudio.com/videoarchivee.html.
crossover potential, or a perverse slippage within his practice between industries, contexts, and value systems: these same New Yorker subscribers could easily become readers of Fuck Seth Price as well, and might even find a review of it here in these same, Brioni-branded pages.78

By choosing this image as the cover of Fuck Seth Price, Price demonstrates a strategic manipulation of context that intends to situate a multitude of visual referents and cultural domains in conjunction with one another—a dispersion of associations that reflects a desire for maximum exposure and fluidity of identity.

While the second and third editions of Fuck Seth Price share the same jacket design, Price made a minor yet significant alteration to the third edition of his novel. In the most recent edition of Fuck Seth Price, which is the version available for free in PDF form on the artist’s website, Price changed the gender of his unnamed protagonist from male to female. The novel’s opening line, “He drifted through a thick and obscure world,” was changed to “She drifted through a thick and obscure world,”79 along with the rest of the pronouns throughout the book which refer to the protagonist. (When quoting and referring to the text, I’ll be using the female pronouns of the third edition, as this was the version I read.) While Price’s motives for altering his text remain uncertain, as the artist has not addressed the modification publicly, it is apparent that the change indicates a mischievous defiance of literary (and artistic) convention, in which the finalized work, once released out in the world, remains in a fossilized state. Thus, Fuck Seth Price is not a fixed narrative—multiple versions of the text exist, causing a central element of the protagonist’s identity to remain in a state of flux when attempting to consider the “true” narrative of the work. This slight modification can be read as a symbolic gesture which points either to the contemporary discourse around gender fluidity, or to the gendered nature of autofiction as a

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genre, as the twenty-first century has seen a plethora of female authors write in the mode of autofiction to great acclaim. However, this move equally puts into question the importance of such a detail to the work as a whole. With this alteration, Price baits the reader to consider what comprises the essence of the work of art (or if such a thing exists).

Though Price categorizes his text as a novel, there are in fact very few elements of Fuck Seth Price that read as novelistic. The novel contains only one character, Price’s unnamed protagonist, who serves as a virtually identity-less persona who Price attributes the text’s critical reflections to. While the protagonist carries out a number of “furtive activities that she couldn’t make sense of,“ including murder and abduction, the reader too proves largely incapable of making any sense of these actions. Thus, Fuck Seth Price tends to read not so much like a novel, but like an essay. Price devotes a majority of the text to various discursive ruminations on a broad range of subjects relevant to art and culture in the digital age, including passages on the transcendence of persona-driven artists, the parallel histories of film and the personal computer, and the link between the era of advanced digital technology and World War II as mutual points of noncomprehension. Though the novel lacks a conventional, plot-driven narrative, Price establishes a discursive rhythm to his protagonist’s thoughts and arguments, forming a sort of conceptual narrative arc. In placing all of his ruminations in the context of a novel, Price effectively frees his text from the restraints of the essay and all of its academic (i.e. non-artistic) overtones. Regarding the novel’s essayistic qualities, critic Claire Lehmann writes:

As Price has stated, “with an essay you assume the writer is saying what they really think,” while Fuck Seth Price, he says, is full of “stuff I think and stuff I don’t think, all mixed up.” Price seems to have adopted the construct of autofiction so as to write an essay—at times uncomfortably honest, potentially inflammatory, possibly cynical—under the guise of plausible deniability, allowing the elastic fabric of the novel to cloak his intentions.81

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80 Ibid.
Here, Lehmann elucidates Price’s motivation for presenting as a novel what can most aptly be described as an essay. While the essay as form typically (but not always) signals a discursive search for truth and fixed meaning within the framework of an argument, the novel, and art in general, remains the forum for subjectivity, ambiguity, and fluidity of meaning. Thus, in taking the steps necessary to viably label *Fuck Seth Price* a novel, Price manipulates the manner in which his text is approached and considered.

In the novel’s opening paragraph, Price introduces his protagonist as an artist who has inexplicably found herself in a state of total dissociation. “Observant but incapable of action,” she has lost the ability to consciously control her body’s movements, causing the protagonist to remain stuck in a stream of analytic thought—a mode which she will stay in for the remainder of the novel. Regarding the sequence of events which caused his protagonist to reach this level of detachment, Price explains:

> This [situation] certainly afforded her plenty of time to figure out exactly where things had gone wrong, and she came to blame her obsession with ‘keeping up’—with technology, with the young, with the culture—a pursuit that had replaced even artistic production as her chief occupation, filling the vacuum that had opened up when she had more or less stopped making art.  

Here, on the first page of the novel, Price makes transparent the affinity he shares with his protagonist, effectively establishing *Fuck Seth Price* as a work of autofiction. In revealing that his protagonist has taken a hiatus from standard modes of artistic production—just as Price himself had done when writing this novel—Price blurs the border between his role as author and subject of *Fuck Seth Price*.

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83 Ibid.
Before figuring out the point of origin of her disenchantment with art—“where things had gone wrong”—Price’s protagonist recalls the moment that triggered the blossoming of her artistic career. While in an Italian restaurant in the early 2000s, the artist considers the roundabout manner in which conventional Italian-American “comfort” dishes such as spaghetti and meatballs came to be served as signature dishes at trendy, high-end restaurants by the turn of the century. As Price explains, these modest dishes, while always a staple of home cooking, were rendered obsolete in the highbrow culinary world in the 1980s after chefs brought “real” Italian cuisine to American restaurants, until their resurgence in the twenty-first century:

Recently, however, which is to say in the early 2000s, shortly before she’d had her revelation, some notable chef had realized that spaghetti and meatballs was what people had wanted all along, and why shouldn’t they have it?...What you did was trundle out lowbrow recipes and thematize them, burnishing them for a new audience too young to remember why the recipes had been discarded in the first place.\(^{84}\)

Once enough time had passed, once encountering a myriad of exotic and fancy-sounding dishes had become the norm when one chose to partake in fine Italian dining, sophisticated chefs were met with praise when returning back to the basics of Italian-American cuisine. Price describes this process of revitalization as “upcycling.” Price’s narrator then realizes the lurking potential for a similar process to occur in the realm of painting—a return to formalist-leaning abstraction, repackaged with the necessary “knowingness” of the form’s historical roots and once presumed obsolescence, and burnished with a subtle nod to contemporaneity for good measure.

It is in the context of her realization of the bond shared between the progressive arcs of Italian-American culinary practice and avant-garde painting that Price’s protagonist develops her own painterly style, which strove to embody the contemporary moment of the early aughts. Price’s elaborate description of these process-based paintings—written in the sort of tongue-in-

\(^{84}\) Ibid., 8-9.
cheek style reserved for an analysis of one’s early work—verifies that the artist is in fact describing the motivating factors which led to Price’s own experiments in painting in the 2000s. In these works, Price utilizes radical, technologically-forward materials such as vacuum-sealed polystyrene in a painterly fashion, combining computer-generated processes with more conventional materials such as enamel and acrylic. [Fig. 16, 17] The list of media and materials used in a work of this ilk is typically multiple lines long, an attribute which Price playfully mocks when describing his protagonist’s process: “the all-important twist here, the redeeming feature, would be the way in which this work was generated, which would expand in importance, endowing the abstraction with meaning.”

Price continues to undermine this method of production, writing, “In truth, the production method hardly mattered, because whichever she chose, the results would look more or less the same: tepid compositions, hesitant and minimal in appearance, kind of pretty and kind of whatever, loaded with backstory.”

Autofiction affords Price just enough distance from standard modes of criticism (primarily due to a lingering doubt regarding the writer’s sincerity) in order to safely critique his past work in a way that transcends mere revisionist history or self-examination. Regarding the particular license which writing about art in the context of a novel affords the artist, Price notes:

> With art as a topic and a place I was writing from I was able to explore something I had license to exploit, but then to do it in a questionable way, to make it as indefensible as if I’d finished the YA novel. I could explore lines of thinking that took the narrator to absurd places, places I don’t necessarily agree with, that don’t represent what Seth Price believes.

Though *Fuck Seth Price* contains a number of passages that could read as conventional art criticism, Price’s ruminations remain protected from literal interpretation by the persistent

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85 Ibid., 12.
86 Ibid., 13.
“fiction” in autofiction, an effect of the decision to frame the text as a novel. Therefore, the sentiments expressed within the text remain at the level of ideas rather than wholehearted discourse.

After exposing rather flippantly the conceptual underpinnings of his earlier visual work, Price addresses his protagonist’s (and of course his own) subsequent turn to writing. Disenchanted with the formulaic nature of the digitally-informed abstract paintings that had accounted for much of her success, the protagonist develops a growing interest in writing and literature—though Price notes that the artist had previously written a few “oddball critical essays” that had circulated in the art world, a clear reference to “Dispersion.”

Price then delineates the primary distinction between how art and literature function culturally: while contemporary art exists in a perpetual state of insularity, contemporary literature is a popular form that can reach a mass audience, thanks in large part to its inherently distributional nature. Price also contrasts the two worlds along the axes of their relationships to representation and capital. While literature remains generally associated with representational, humanistic modes of expression such as narrative and psychological exploration, contemporary art has made abstraction its primary mode for over a century now. Price argues that the inscrutability of abstraction has reinforced contemporary art’s status as an art for the elite, and thus its inextricable relationship to finance and the market. In contrast, Price notes that “writing…which had little connection to money and power, was only broadening its already considerable mass appeal, thanks to the proliferation of texting, tweeting, blogging, and so on, even as those same forces were emancipating writing from its long-standing narrative conventions.”

Contrary to producing or collecting visual art, writing and publishing literature is typically not regarded as a

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particularly profitable enterprise, a characteristic which protects radical literature from many of the claims of hypocrisy that befall politically engaged art. Thus, Price suggests that, with the multiplicity of discursive forums available on the internet, literature and the act of writing carry expanded aesthetic and political potential, as words take on new meaning in the age of social media as reinvigorated instruments opposing capital.

While in her dissociative state, Price’s protagonist commits a number of murderous and otherwise nefarious acts, which are alluded to sparingly throughout the novel. This narrative, which serves as the novel’s only conventional plot line, has been written so as to remain hazy and confusing, seemingly having gone nowhere by the book’s end. After introducing the conditions of his protagonist, Price drops the narrative abruptly before resuming it in short passages detailing the protagonist’s exploits, which usually bookend a section thematically unified by the subject of the artist’s reflections. This effectively establishes the protagonist’s specific musings in each section as concurrent with her actions. An example occurs on page 26, when Price writes:

She found herself idly watching as she snuck into an apartment building through a propped service door, strangled a porter hauling garbage bags through a trash room, and made her way up the emergency stairs to the twelfth floor. As her body went through these motions, prescriptions that she now knew were impossible to countermand, her mind cast itself in wide, slow circles, alert and energetic. American culture, she mused, rested on a kind of fundamental folklore…

Price then proceeds to dive into an analysis of why artists remain motivated to make art, and how radicality is achieved. This vague persistence of narrative serves as one possible way to justify *Fuck Seth Price*’s status as a novel, giving the book some sort of plot, no matter how indeterminate, to coincide with Price’s lengthy musings on art and “the digital.” However, it seems a rather cheap gimmick on the part of the artist—the inclusion of an airy narrative simply

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90 Ibid., 26.
so Price can claim he wrote a novel. Yet it also distances *Fuck Seth Price* from autofiction, as the genre typically eschews sensational plot lines in favor of events that mirror the relatively quotidian experiences of its author. In describing *Fuck Seth Price* using forms and genres (novel, autofiction) which maintain a questionable relationship to his actual text, Price undermines the expectations of the reader, enacting a situation in which the reader is urged to question the nature of Price’s text and formulate their own categorization of the work.

Price’s specific inquiry into categorization proves particularly apt when working with the novel, as the essential qualities of the form remain largely unfixed despite centuries of practice and analysis. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “novel” as “a fictitious prose narrative of book length, typically representing character and action with some degree of realism.” As evidenced by the inclusion of the word “typically” and the phrase “some degree” in its definition, the form leaves room for a considerable degree of play in its procedures and qualities, to say nothing of its intended effect on the reader. This kind of play is certainly evident in *Reena Spaulings*, which contains a radical notion of character in its protagonist’s mutability, as well as varying degrees of realism and unrealism. However, *Fuck Seth Price*, written a decade later, makes *Reena Spaulings* seem a rather conventional novel in comparison, as Bernadette Corporation maintained elements of character development and narrative arc that went largely neglected by Price. This difference demonstrates the contrasting perspectives from which each artist approached the novel. In an interview with the Dutch art magazine *Metropolis M*, Price describes his approach to framing *Fuck Seth Price* as such:

> The context of the work is on the same level of importance as the material of the work...it’s just a text until you situate it materially in the world. So you design it as a book. What kind of book? Well, you could publish it as something that takes its form from the world of literature, but then what is the text itself?...The art world is really good

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at providing an arena where you can write anything, because there are no rules… I had wanted to write a novel for years and years, as art, but I also like to read and I was just curious about the state of literature.92

While Bernadette Corporation’s interest in the novel as form is largely content-based, stemming from the desire to bring their collective ethos to the writing process and explore the idea of the protagonist as representative of a collective consciousness, Price’s interest in the novel is almost wholly context-based, as the artist considers how framing the work as a novel, though it just barely resembles the form, alters the work’s circulation and reception.

On November 20, 2015, a few months after the publication of the novel’s first edition, Seth Price read from *Fuck Seth Price* at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Though billed merely as a reading, Price approached the event, which was staged at the Whitney’s Susan and John Hess Family Theater, as a performance, responding to the unique spatial dynamics of the space. As Price explains:

The double glass partition in their auditorium offered a good way to present a novel, as an author trapped in a box, physically separate but on display, unable to hear the audience, or even see them, thanks to the lighting setup, and audible to them only via a wireless PA. So all the elements of the evening were pulled apart and made artificial, but at the same time it was live. I was all Lavaliered and spot lit, I slicked my hair back and wore makeup, and I had on this dumb outfit of black gym gear and ultra-white New Balance.93

Sporting a lavalier microphone and an athleisure costume unusual for the typically fashionable yet understated artist, Price performed his reading as a product launch, mimicking the aesthetic conventions of a Silicon Valley keynote while reciting passages from the novel in the familiar cadence of a TED talk. [Fig. 18, 19] By imitating a lecture style associated with the technological innovations of the contemporary moment—a subject which the text is largely

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concerned with—Price adds a performative element to the novel in its presentation to a distinctly art crowd, bringing further legitimacy to the idea that the novel alternatively functions as an “art gesture” and as an experiment in context. This performative element of *Fuck Seth Price* relates the work back to *Reena Spaulings*, as Reena Spaulings was constructed so as to become a character who could be performed by members of Bernadette Corporation outside of literature, whether as a gallerist or an artist. Though differing in his execution, Price similarly performs a version of his novel’s protagonist in his reading of the work.

Price describes his motivation for attaching such an aggressive and sardonic title to his novel as such:

> I think playing with oppositions is part of it. That title is not a title from the world of literature, it’s an artwork title, basically. That kind of gesture of aggression towards the audience and yourself, I don’t think that’s the kind of title you’d see in most literature. It’s like a stamp from the art world, saying this is actually also an artwork, even if I won’t distribute it in the art world and we’re not putting it in a show. And it shouldn’t be in a show. The whole point is it’s not in that world.

Here, it seems that Price reads the title of his novel as somewhat of a neutralizing gesture, one that explicitly brings the literary object that the artist has created back “home” to its status as artwork. However, in insisting that *Fuck Seth Price* isn’t necessarily *in* the art world—despite its title acting as a stamp *from* the art world—Price attempts to use his status as a reputable visual artist to successfully transition into the realm of literature, as the novel’s self-referential title seems to suggest. The inclusion of a passage from *Fuck Seth Price* in an issue of esteemed literary magazine *Harper’s* indicates that the tactic was possibly effective; even so, Price’s assumption that his name alone offers the artist easy mobility between the largely discrete worlds

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of art and literature conveys an air of oblivion and narcissism. However, by using his status as a respected artist to attract readers through the excessive promotion of his identity in relation to the work, Price more so responds to a condition of the contemporary artist than reflects a genuine belief in his own exceptionalism.

Among the more intriguing subjects covered in *Fuck Seth Price* is an extended deliberation on the role that persona plays in art making. Price approaches the issue using a method that he employs throughout the novel, exposing two opposing yet mutually valid ways of considering persona’s importance to art. The author begins by addressing Jeff Koons, the quintessential artist-as-businessman whose black-tie conventionalism seems to dispel the notion that “artistic expression belonged in an unruly, anarchic persona.” Price’s protagonist becomes convinced that “appearance was a red herring, it meant nothing,” as evidenced by the mild manners of radical figures such as Marcel Duchamp, Georges Bataille, and William S. Burroughs. However, the protagonist reverses course later in the novel, coming to the realization that “the most perverse [artistic] twists often manifested not in the work but in the artist persona, the narrative surrounding the work, the face turned to the public.” This is exemplified by figures such as Kanye West and Jeff Koons, who, contrary to the protagonist’s previous assessment of the artist, is in fact “so stubbornly idiosyncratic in his pursuit of his vision…that he found himself careering into eccentricities and perversions that threatened the mass appeal he craved.” Yet Price also cites Bob Dylan and Godard as examples of artists who manipulated their personas in order to embody the reclusive artist with no obligations to the mainstream, a tactic which comes with its own advantages and possibilities.

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97 Ibid.
98 Ibid., 90.
99 Ibid., 91.
As the artist gives ample consideration to notions of context, Price is fascinated with the effects that an artist’s persona has on their work, finding a unique potential for subversion in the building and maintenance of one’s image. John Kelsey distills Price’s artistic career down to a “production of a ‘perverted body’ or fiction called Seth Price,” as Price has tinkered with the idea of the artist as social role and what that identity entails throughout his career. Is Fuck Seth Price in part a persona-building, self-mythologizing pursuit? The answer is yes, without a doubt, as every step of Price’s framing of the novel indicates—from the title, to the cover, to the Whitney keynote. This approach to authorship, in which the author’s identity is made inextricable from the work, stands in stark contrast to Bernadette Corporation’s collective approach to Reena Spaulings, which denied the possibility for individual attribution—a distinction which demonstrates the variance of purposes for which the artist can employ the novel as form.

In an essay for the catalogue of a 2017 retrospective of Price’s work, John Kelsey considers how notions of brand and celebrity function in the contemporary art world, in an era when artists gain followers through the cultivation of an online identity and discourse increasingly occurs on social media. Kelsey claims that “the artist has now become a moving image, performing a strange new mobility in response to the post-medium conditions of art.” If wanting to provoke real impact in the art world and beyond, the artist can no longer “let the work speak for itself,” but rather must address the “post-medium conditions of art” head on by speaking not only through art, but around art. It is in this context that one must consider Price’s incorporation of both his name in the title and his face on the cover of his novel, as such details

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101 Ibid., 265.
are ultimately instruments for the work’s distribution, a phase of production which Price maintains a particular interest in. Regarding the specific ways in which Price frames and distributes his work, Kelsey writes, “By unsettling and troubling the relationship between art and its weird new medial conditions, Price shows where the real work and the real fun need to happen: in this gap where the unity of the work was once imagined, here between art and its information.”

Between art (the paint on the canvas, the words in a novel) and its “information” (or context) lies an abundance of space which determines how, and how much, the art is received by the viewing public. By placing markers of his identity in this space, whether his name or his image, Price simultaneously gestures toward and enacts the increased significance of identity and persona in contemporary art.

As *Fuck Seth Price* draws to a close, Price’s protagonist questions the ultimate value of all of her theorizing on art and digital culture:

> It was easy and even commonsensical to believe that everything was melting into everything else in the face of the cloud and its triumph of immateriality, as long as you took into account only art, money, culture, and images. These happened to be her consuming interests, but this only marked her as a typical denizen of the West, which, to the outrage of the non-West, was obsessed with these means of abolishing time and space.

Realizing that the fact of “brute materiality, or, to put it another way, human suffering” tends to go overlooked in these critical discourses, the protagonist attempts to understand the process by which violence is displaced from reality and dispersed into images, which then circulate on the internet—a subject first broached by Price in 2005, with his series *Hostage Video Stills*. These works, which contain elements of both painting and sculpture yet evade both mediums, see Price familiarly working with unconventional materials. *Hostage Video Still With Time*

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102 Ibid., 267.
104 Ibid., 118.
Stamp [Fig. 20] features an image—taken from a video which circulated online in 2004 depicting Islamic militants decapitating the captured American businessman Nicholas Berg—silkscreened onto unfurled rolls of clear polyester film, or Mylar. When hung on the wall, the Mylar sheets are treated to a messy installation process which twists and crumples the work into random configurations, altering the legibility of the image in a number of variations. Art historian David Joselit interprets this method of presentation as a “spatial metaphor for the ostensibly ‘immaterial’ traffic of images online,”¹⁰⁵ a representation of the method by which violent acts are dispersed into images that flood the internet. In the closing passages of Fuck Seth Price, Price considers how these representational images curtail the effects which real violence enacts upon bodies every day in the world, providing a lens through which comfortable liberals of the West can be aware of injustices without feeling or understanding their full extent. It is perhaps this situation which has led Price’s protagonist to murder, a demonstration of the ultimate outcome of making “keeping up” via images one’s chief occupation—complete dissociation and dillusion.

Seth Price’s artistic career has been one characterized by constant momentum within a sustained thematic inquiry. “Dispersion,” self-published before the artist’s first solo show (a point at which Price was primarily focused on video work), remains a sort of urtext for Price’s visual oeuvre, a theoretical foundation which virtually all of the artist’s subsequent work harkens back to in some capacity. This notion is felt most prominently in the final pages of Fuck Seth Price, as Price explicitly describes the process by which images are dispersed through the internet, referencing the title of his influential 2002 text while demonstrating how he subsequently applied the concept to his visual work. Fuck Seth Price both reflects on and builds upon the ideas established throughout the artist’s career, serving as a possible culmination of

some sorts of a vast line of thinking that has consumed the artist’s practice up to the present day. While many artists would shiver at the idea of converting the core concerns of their visual practice into clear language in book form, laying the thoughts and motives which underlie their art bare in a gesture of complete vulnerability, Price does just that with this text. The reader is left wondering, why is Price willing to expose the methodology behind his practice in this way? What does he achieve by taking this risk, other than undermining his own work? Can it really all be for the sake of self-mythologization, the maintenance of persona? For a possible answer to these questions, the reader must turn to the novel’s frontispiece. [Fig. 21] This image, a digital rendering of a sketch originally executed in black watercolor on paper, depicts a pair of ghostly, cartoonish hands with leaflike veins running through them, reaching out from the spine of an open book. Like the hand drawn cover of Reena Spaulings, this crude image metaphorizes what Price’s novel attempts to do: act as a direct medium through which the artist can reach out and touch his reader, revealing to his audience in a shared language the ideas which constitute his mode of being—that of the artist.
Conclusion

In the preface to *Reena Spaulings*, Bernadette Corporation proclaims that “*Reena Spaulings* is not the *On The Road* or *The Great Gatsby* of these times, which is to say that these times do not need or want those kinds of books. If the Novel, today, has lost much of its seductive power and its necessity, perhaps we can fill it with something else.”  

The omnipresence of screens and the never-ending stream of content available on the internet threatens virtually all forms of engagement with analog objects, though possibly none more than the novel. As a medium which demands time, careful attention, and critical thought from its audience, it will be interesting to see the degree to which my generation and subsequent ones, constantly engaging with the mainstream, culturally dominant forms of music, TV, and film, keep up with contemporary literature. Can literature remain, to some degree, a mainstream cultural form, or will it become a niche yet intensely studied practice, as is contemporary art? In either case, the precarious state of the novel in the digital age opens up a profound opportunity for artists to explore the medium’s possibilities and discover what it would look like to turn the novel into “something else,” as Bernadette Corporation suggests. While acknowledging the reduced role of the novel in contemporary culture, neither Bernadette Corporation nor Seth Price mourn the novel or attempt to write its elegy; to the contrary, both artists find opportunity in the medium’s current state of flux, as have a number of artists in recent years.

There are a number of institutional and academic frameworks in place that are working to promote and disseminate the artist’s novel, and artists’ writings in general. Chris Kraus notes that the notion of art writing has “metastasized in the last several years,” as evidenced by the emergence of various graduate programs in both the states and Europe which specialize in the

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practice.\textsuperscript{107} This sentiment is echoed by critic Maria Fusco, who writes, “Academic programmes such as the MFA in Art Writing at Goldsmiths (formed in 2008)…propagate and debate what it is to write in and with art,” while “two recent institutional shows in large-scale venues have made a good stab at cohering writing forms together: \textit{Gagarin: The Artists in Their Own Words} at S.M.A.K., Ghent (2009), and \textit{The Malady of Writing: A project on text and speculative imagination} at MACBA, Barcelona (2009).”\textsuperscript{108} Such attempts to contextualize and exhibit artists’ writings at major international museums demonstrate the degree to which textual forms are being engaged with critically as artworks, a notion which is further legitimized by the development of graduate programs devoted solely to writing as a distinctly artistic practice. Additionally, publishing houses such as Berlin’s Sternberg Press and London’s Book Works specialize in the publication of artists’ novels, working at the intersection of contemporary art and literature and increasingly bringing the two practices in conversation with one another. As educational programs, publishers, and critical studies engaged with writing as an artistic practice continue to surface, new manifestations of the artist’s novel will certainly emerge in coming years.

The intriguing aspect which sets the artist’s novel apart from the more general notion of artists’ writings is the fact that the artist’s novel is ultimately also an artist’s book, situating the form within a long lineage which connects back to the Conceptual moment of the 1960s. In giving ample consideration to the design, formatting, and contextualization of their novels (including elements such as Price’s drawing serving as frontispiece, BC’s sketch serving as cover, and BC’s two page, bra-shaped concrete poem), Bernadette Corporation and Seth Price

don’t merely write texts, but rather produce dynamic artists’ books. Thus, while textual works by nature, both Reena Spaulings and Fuck Seth Price additionally function as distinct visual objects. Combining visual and discursive elements seems a perfect artistic strategy for the “post-medium moment,” as the delineations between forms become increasingly vague due to the flattening effects of the computer screen and the internet. Though Dan Graham and Robert Smithson also added visual elements to their textual works by including photographs in their magazine articles, the aesthetics of contemporary artists’ writings have changed alongside broader changes in artistic movements. While the rather pragmatic presentations of Graham’s and Smithson’s magazine articles reflect the aesthetic tendencies of the Minimalist movement of the sixties, Price and Bernadette Corporation belong to no coherent movement and are active at a moment in which aesthetic trends proliferate though none dominate avant-garde practice. Yet both artists created objects in the form of novels that reflect their distinct aesthetic inclinations—Bernadette Corporation’s mix of bland corporatism and neo-Situationist radicalism, and Seth Price’s technologically advanced, tongue-in-cheek mystification.

As these novels and the general burgeoning of artists’ writings in the past two decades demonstrate, art continues to be displaced from the visual to the verbal field. While Craig Owens claimed the modernist tendency to “confine the artist within the sharply delineated boundaries of a single aesthetic discipline” to be no longer tenable in 1979, \(^{109}\) this notion has become profoundly more apparent in 2019. In a passage quoted by Price in “Dispersion,” art historian Benjamin Buchloh declares, “To recognize, let alone to accept, the relative immutability of historically formed discursive artistic genres, institutional structures, and distribution forms as obstacles that are ultimately persistent (if not insurmountable) marks the most profound crisis for

\(^{109}\) Craig Owens, “Earthwords,” October no. 10 (Fall 1979), 125.
the artist identified with a model of avant-garde practice.” In an age in which digital technologies and invisible networks allow for new methods of producing and distributing images, texts, and ideas, it is the duty of the artist to challenge the “relative immutability” of our institutions, social hierarchies, and oppressive systems by manipulating mediums to new ends. The only way to realize such lofty ambitions is by stepping out of the existent bounds which define the “artist,” hybridizing and developing altogether new modes of practice which utilize every form through which humans are able to manifest, communicate, and connect.

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Fig. 1 Lawrence Weiner, *In Relation to an Increase in Quantity Regardless of Quality…*, Medium and dimensions variable, 1973-74, Museum of Modern Art, New York, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78869.

Fig. 3 Dan Graham, *Schema* (March 1966), Fifteen sheets of printed paper and paper with felt-tip pen, colored pencil, pencil, typewriting, and ballpoint pen on colored paper-faced board, 1966-70, Museum of Modern Art, New York, [https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201207/dan-graham-31966](https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201207/dan-graham-31966).

Fig. 5 Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, Mud, precipitated salt crystals, rocks, water coil, 1970, Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah, [https://www.robertsmithson.com/](https://www.robertsmithson.com/).

Fig. 7 Bernadette Corporation, Front and back cover of *Reena Spaulings*, 2005. New York: Semiotext(e), https://www.crousel.com/home/print/335/.

Fig. 8 Édouard Manet, *Young Lady in 1866*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 185.1 x 128.6 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436964.
Keep separate, support, elevate, and split the round, spacious "cheeks" and roots keep them from overlapp-
ing. Not those "cheeks" with a hole between
them, but those large bridges between the arms. The
cheeks inhale these spacious apartments. Some are
cheeks inhabit these spacious apartments. Some are
round, like large peas. Those that inhabit the hollow
architecture I described are round piles, like humble potatos,
architecture I described are round piles, like humble potatos,
some of them support the "cheeks" or
home in them. Some of them support the "cheeks" or
and "potatoes" I described, and some make them project more, and
some I suspect, lessens them. Many are white, their diagonally cut
some I suspect, lessens them. Many are white, their diagonally cut
strips lessens on the sides and ends and they clam from behind.
strips lessens on the sides and ends and they clam from behind.
A house for these cheeks, a hole in an architecture, these
A house for these cheeks, a hole in an architecture, these
structures of beauty are designed with flourishes, fringes, and
structures of beauty are designed with flourishes, fringes, and
ornamentation. Vitruvius probably never could design
ornamentation. Vitruvius probably never could design
apartments like these, separate spacious houses. And
apartments like these, separate spacious houses. And
muons, Orpheus not have failed such
muons, Orpheus not have failed such
a musical beauty on his Pandun
a musical beauty on his Pandun
pipe. These
pipe. These

flourishes branch off mul-
timodally. Look how the ours-
murition is cut above, before and behind.
flourishes, fringes, fluted and flared, overlapping
end to end, suggesting trees, towns, houses, with
end to end, suggesting trees, towns, houses, with
roofs, cupboards, shuttles, and gates. Would I were
roofs, cupboards, shuttles, and gates. Would I were
there looking in those glass windows beyond these towns
there looking in those glass windows beyond these towns
and squares! Of its many styles some others suggest lichens
and squares! Of its many styles some others suggest lichens
and mosses. Yet inside these is where life
and mosses. Yet inside these is where life
Wards cannot properly describe that which is beyond. That
Wards cannot properly describe that which is beyond. That
which is under. Yet that which is not visible, that which is squashed
which is under. Yet that which is not visible, that which is squashed
under the architecture, flattened under this bark of this tree, that
under the architecture, flattened under this bark of this tree, that
which is rejected, harrted at, or held out considerably: what inter-
which is rejected, harrted at, or held out considerably: what inter-
ests me and keeps me interested in life. It never ends until
ests me and keeps me interested in life. It never ends until
I'm dead. I like it once or twice removed. I like nothing
I'm dead. I like it once or twice removed. I like nothing
on, or maybe I like it onet. I like that house down
on, or maybe I like it onet. I like that house down
there with its for gables and those piec-
there with its for gables and those piec-
esque, round piles beyond, over
esque, round piles beyond, over
and upwards.
and upwards.

Fig. 9 Bernadette Corporation, Pages 40-41 of *Reena Spaulings*, 2005. New York: Semiotext(e).

Fig. 10 Reena Spaulings, *The Bricks*, 2006. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 243.8 x 1219.2
Fig. 10 Reena Spaulings, *The Bricks*, 2006. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 243.8 x 1219.2

Fig. 12 Seth Price, Installation view of *Danny, Hannah, Mila, Ariana, Bob, Brad* at MoMA PS1, New York, 2018. Courtesy of Seth Price Images, [https://sethpriceimages.com/](https://sethpriceimages.com/).

Fig. 15 Seth Price, Cover of second edition of *Fuck Seth Price*, 2016. New York: The Leopard Press, [https://tenderbooks.co.uk/](https://tenderbooks.co.uk/).


Fig. 18 Seth Price reading from *Fuck Seth Price* at The Whitney Museum of American Art, November 20, 2015. Photograph by Filip Wolok, [https://believermag.com/logger/2016-07-12-the-artists-novel-3/](https://believermag.com/logger/2016-07-12-the-artists-novel-3/).
Fig. 19 Seth Price reading at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, November 2015, [https://www.textezurkunst.de/articles/fuck-seth-price-en/](https://www.textezurkunst.de/articles/fuck-seth-price-en/).

Fig. 20 Seth Price, *Hostage Video Still With Time Stamp*, 2005. Freeze-frame from Jihadi video file screen-printed on archival polyester librarian’s film with signage ink, steel grommets. Courtesy of Seth Price Images, [https://sethpriceimages.com](https://sethpriceimages.com).
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