



YOU JUST HAVE TO EXPERIENCE IT

BUREAU FOR OPEN CULTURE

presents

YOU JUST HAVE TO EXPERIENCE IT

written by
and produced by

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You Just Have to Experience It combines citations culled from the book *Beyond Objecthood: The Exhibition as a Critical Form* since 1968 to trace a history of the changing role of the spectator in art and exhibitions from Minimalism to Relational Art, and New Institutionalism to the present.

Produced on the occasion of the launch of *Beyond Objecthood*, this public talk in the shape of a performance reading presents a brief history of the exhibition as a critical form from the 1960s to the present, a form that inherently solicits spectators into temporal and spatial experiences and situations as indispensable components of the work.

The title refers to a statement by the American artist Tony Smith who recounts in a 1966 *Artforum* interview a ride on the newly minted New Jersey Turnpike, recalling a transformative nighttime experience of moving through space and time on the unmarked highway. This experience caused him to question the viability of art to represent something like that. *You Just Have to Experience It* uses this moment as a point of departure to explore how the criticality once posed by figures like Smith who solicited spectators into durational experiences in their work faces many challenges, not least of which is competing with the institutions that give it voice in an era when the differences between art and entertainment increasingly blur.

Cast (in order of appearance)

<u>TONY SMITH</u>	artist
<u>JAMES VOORHIES</u>	curator, art historian, and narrator
<u>MICHAEL FRIED</u>	art historian and critic
<u>ROBERT SMITHSON</u>	artist
<u>MICHAEL ASHER</u>	artist
<u>MIWON KWON</u>	art historian and critic
<u>JULIE AULT</u>	artist and writer
<u>ROBERT MORRIS</u>	artist
<u>JONAS EKEBERG</u>	curator and writer
<u>MARIA LIND</u>	curator and writer
<u>LIAM GILICK</u>	artist
<u>ALEX FARQUHARSON</u>	curator and writer
<u>NICOLAS BOURRIAUD</u>	curator and writer
<u>CLAIRE BISHOP</u>	art historian and critic
<u>ROSALIND KRAUSS</u>	art historian and critic

NEW JERSEY, 1955

TONY SMITH It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes and colored lights. This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done. At first I didn't know what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art.

NARRATOR And so the American artist Tony Smith recounted in a 1966 *Artforum* interview with writer and collector Samuel Wagstaff, which appeared one year before the critic Michael Fried's seminal *Artforum* essay "Art and Objecthood." A discourse on the temporal and spatial experience of art was capturing the attention of artists and critics. "Art and Objecthood" was at the center. Published in June 1967, Fried denounced what he perceived as theatricality in the work of figures like Smith, and others such as Robert Morris and Donald Judd.

Theater, Fried said, is "what lies between the arts," and the "concepts of quality and value" are possible "only within the *individual arts*." An artwork's inability to maintain conviction, he thought, meant it sacrificed artistic autonomy. It sacrificed medium specificity.

Unable to reconcile the position of "not-painting" and "not-sculpture" while understanding the work as *art*, Fried identified this condition as "objecthood."

MICHAEL FRIED It is this continuous and entire *presentness*, amounting, as it were, to the perpetual creation of itself, that one experiences as a kind of *instantaneousness*, as though if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it.

ARTFORUM, 1967

NARRATOR Another kind of theater played out on the pages of *Artforum* between Fried and the American artist Robert Smithson. Four months after these words appeared, Smithson wrote a rebuttal in a letter to the editor, challenging Fried's insistence on the modernist notion that works of art connect with a spectator through a momentary, or "instantaneous," engagement. In fact, Fried had assigned a religious quality to this experience, concluding his essay with "Presentness is grace."

ROBERT SMITHSON Michael Fried has set the critical stage for *manneristic modernism*, although he is trying hard not to fall from the 'grip' of grace. This grace he maintains by avoiding appearance, or by keeping art at "arm's length." What Fried fears most is the consciousness of what he is doing—namely being himself theatrical. He dreads "distance" because that

would force him to become aware of the role he is playing. Fried, the orthodox modernist, the keeper of the gospel of Clement Greenberg has been "struck by Tony Smith," the agent of endlessness.

NARRATOR This story begins here in late the 1960s when the spectator became an essential factor in the completion of a work of art. It is a story of the exhibition as a critical form, a form that relies on the spectator's durational experience of time and space. This story charts a brief history of exhibitions and artworks from 1968 to the present to explore how we arrived at a moment when the criticality once embedded in the art of figures like Smithson faces many challenges, not least of which is competing with the art institutions that give it voice.

NEW YORK, 1968

NARRATOR Smithson took his critique from the pages of *Artforum* and made it visible in a series of works he called "non-sites." Non-sites demand that spectators take time looking, walking, seeing, reading, and thinking about the meaning of the arrangements of objects, texts, and images placed inside a gallery.

All from 1968, non-sites mark a pivotal moment in the history of modern art, whereby the arrangement of objects inside the gallery became integrated into an artist's working process. Non-sites often consist of three parts: media, such as maps, photographs, and descriptive texts of a site; mineral samples, for example, sand, rocks,

dirt, and slag taken from a site; and metal bins or trays fabricated with machine-like precision. The arrangement of these components "point" to actual sites often situated within landscapes on "fringes" or "boundaries."

The critical challenge by Smithson is the non-site, a work that takes the form of the exhibition by putting spectators through durational exercises. His staging of experiences between art and spectator, between the interior and exterior sites of the institution, deployed the exhibition in an expanded critical way.

ROBERT SMITHSON I like the artificial limits that the gallery presents. I would say my art exists in two realms—in my outdoor sites which can be visited only and which have no objects imposed on them, and indoors, where objects do exist.

NARRATOR Smithson used the gallery as reference to its immediate place of institutional engagement and as directional, pointing to sites beyond the walls.

ROBERT SMITHSON I think we all see the landscape as coextensive with the gallery. I don't think we're dealing with matter in terms of a back to nature movement. For me the world is a museum. Photography makes nature obsolete. My thinking in terms of the site and non-site makes me feel there's no need to refer to nature anymore. I'm totally concerned with making art and this is mainly an act of viewing, a mental activity that zeroes in on discrete sites. I'm not interested in presenting the medium for its own sake. I think that's a weakness of a lot of contemporary work.

CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA, 1970

NARRATOR Michael Asher's installation at Pomona College was an architectural intervention. Asher explored the introduction of light and sound into the museum without the use of outside objects or equipment. He reconfigured the museum's space into two intersecting triangles inviting spectators to pass through a narrow corridor where the triangles met.

MICHAEL ASHER Entering and moving through the installation, the viewer became increasingly removed from the exterior reality, at the same time perceiving gradual abstractions of that reality within a formally determined and controlled space.

NARRATOR Two glass doors that separated the lobby from the outside were removed. The doorjamb and hinges were covered to remove any sign that a door ever existed.

MICHAEL ASHER I got to a point where I'd figured out the installation and how these two triangular spaces were going to work. Since I was looking at everything that pre-existed, I finally wondered about the doors. Why do I have to use the doors? Because in fact, all the elements that I wanted to use in the work were coming through the passageway anyway, why not have basically a work which truly merges to the out of doors, and yet is defined by the indoors? So I took them off. As a matter of fact, I really liked the idea of accessibility day and night because I was interested

in how the air was changing, the sounds were changing, and light was changing. And if one really wanted to follow it, like I wanted to follow it, they would come back at night to see what shifts were taking place in those three elements.

NARRATOR While major architectural interventions in galleries are commonplace today, Asher's installation at Pomona was unique in early Conceptual Art. His attention to site specificity with regard to the physical structure of the gallery as a cultural dominant, gave rise to what became known as institutional critique.

MIWON KWON In the nascent forms of institutional critique, in fact, the physical conditions of the exhibition space remained the primary point of departure...the task of exposing those aspects which the institution would obscure was enacted literally in relation to the architecture of the exhibition space—highlighting the humidity level of a gallery by allowing moisture to “invade” the pristine minimalist art object; insisting on the material fact of the gallery walls as “framing” devices by notating the walls' dimensions directly on them; removing portions of a wall to reveal the base reality behind the “neutral” white cube; and exceeding the physical boundaries of the gallery by having the art work literally go out the window.

NEW YORK, 1980S

JULIE AULT It is precisely because of the power that exhibitions have in assigning or opening up meanings, in creating contexts and situating

viewers, that standardized exhibition methods and formats as well as display conventions need to be critically rethought and potentially subverted.

THE WHITNEY BIENNIAL, 1985

NARRATOR Group Material participated in the 1985 Whitney Biennial. They made the exhibition *Americana*. The installation represented the collective's interest in rethinking and challenging entrenched institutional behaviors.

JULIE AULT & GROUP MATERIAL

Group Material was founded as a constructive response to the unsatisfactory ways in which art has been conceived, produced, distributed and taught in New York City, in American society. Group Material is an artist-initiated project. We are desperately tired and critical of the drawn-out traditions of formalism, conservatism and pseudo avant-gardism that dominate the official art world. As artists and workers we want to maintain control over our work, directing our energies to the demands of social conditions as opposed to the demands of the art market. While most art institutions separate art from the world, neutralizing any abrasive forms and contents, Group Material accentuates the cutting edge of art. We want our work and the work of others to take a role in a broader cultural activism.

NARRATOR In the Whitney Biennial, the official art world is where Group Material found itself in its first exhibition in a museum. It used *Americana* to reflect on the influence

that the Whitney Museum has on artistic and cultural legitimacy. *Americana* advanced a twofold critique. The late 1970s and early '80s comprised a troubled moment in American and world history. While economic prosperity soared in the United States, the years saw the largest nuclear accident in U.S. history at Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania; the Iranian hostage crisis; the election of Ronald Reagan; the Nicaraguan Revolution; and the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Group Material's exhibition was as much a reflection on the museum industry as an interrogation of the imperialist, neoliberal, corporate, and consumerist agendas responsible for these crises.

JULIE AULT & GROUP MATERIAL

In a Group Material exhibition, a bag of 'Almost Home Cookies' is as important as, say, a piece by Barbara Kruger. Fine art, mass art and commercial products are shown with equal status.

NARRATOR Eric Fischl, Leon Golub, Barbara Kruger, Allan McCollum, Faith Ringgold, Andy Warhol, Martin Wong. Work by these artists and many others is what spectators found. They also found Nabisco cookies, a television broadcasting whatever was on TV at the time, a box of Total cereal. A washer and dryer. They heard a soundtrack of recorded American country music like Tammy Wynette's "I Don't Want to play House" and Loretta Lynn's "You're Gonna Reap What You Sow."

This immersive, atmospheric scene conveyed a cross section of American culture and nationalist pride by way of the lived bodily experience of spectators.

KASSEL, GERMANY, 1972

NARRATOR Move back in time to 1972: the Swiss curator Harald Szeemann's seminal *Documenta 5: Questioning Reality—Image Worlds Today*. Szeemann included various sections with everyday objects and mixed media ranging from political propaganda, caricatures, and comics to pornography, science fiction scenes, and campaign posters for German political parties. He showed material from everyday life. Forty *Spiegel* covers from 1960 to 1972, playing cards with naked female models, designs for new banknotes by the Swiss National Bank, and a range of religious statues and iconography—all on an equal footing with what was considered fine art at the time. Since the museum is one of the most important instruments to legitimate art, he problematized the question of what an institution should show. Robert Smithson considered the approach an affront.

ROBERT SMITHSON Cultural confinement takes place when a curator imposes his own limits on an art exhibition, rather than asking an artist to set his limits. Artists are expected to fit into fraudulent categories. Some artists imagine they've got a hold on this apparatus, which in fact has got a hold of them. As a result, they end up supporting a cultural prison that is out of their control. Artists themselves are not confined, but their output is. Museums, like asylums and jails, have wards and cells—in other words, neutral rooms called “galleries.” A work of art when placed in a gallery loses its charge,

and becomes a portable object or surface disengaged from the outside world. A vacant white room with lights is still a submission to the neutral. Works of art seen in such spaces seem to be going through a kind of esthetic convalescence. They are looked upon as so many inanimate invalids, waiting for critics to pronounce them curable or incurable. The function of the warden-curator is to separate art from the rest of society. Next comes integration. Once the work of art is totally neutralized, ineffective, abstracted, safe, and politically lobotomized it is ready to be consumed by society. All is reduced to visual fodder and transportable merchandise. Innovations are allowed only if they support this kind of confinement.

NARRATOR Indeed, Smithson, like Group Material a decade later, understood the critical value of the exhibition as a form, as a critical apparatus, and thus his annoyance by Szeemann's organization of *Documenta 5*.

But, unlike Group Material, Szeemann's plans were undertaken by a curator and viewed by many artists as a thematic straitjacket, a corruption of the exhibition in which they had originally agreed to participate.

Carl Andre, Hans Haacke, Donald Judd, Barry Le Va, Sol LeWitt, Dorothea Rockburne, Fred Sandback, Richard Serra. They all signed a statement against *Documenta 5*. Robert Morris wrote a letter.

ROBERT MORRIS I wish all work of mine withdrawn from the forthcoming Documenta V. You may post the following statement. I do not wish

to have my work used to illustrate misguided sociological principles or outmoded art historical categories. I do not wish to participate in international exhibitions which do not consult with me as to what work I might want to show but instead dictate to me what will be shown. I do not wish to be associated with an exhibition which refuses to communicate with me after I have indicated my desire to present work other than that which has been designated. Finally, I condemn the showing of any work of mine which has been borrowed from collectors without my having been advised.

NARRATOR This turn toward the curator as a driving conceptual force can be traced to *Documenta 5* when Szeemann elevated the role of the curator to a dynamic, central position and, by extension, gave even more authority to the exhibition and the institution. He is part of what could be viewed as the nascent spirit of New Institutionalism, a spirit whose activity began when the curator became an author of exhibitions, a spirit that gained greater traction in the 1990s, and continues to this moment.

Indeed, the critically reflexive work that came to be called New Institutionalism emerged in the '90s alongside the relational art promoted by Nicolas Bourriaud. New Institutionalism involves the spectator in situations that reduce emphasis on the presentation of the singular art object in favor of a more integrated social engagement between art, spectator, institution, and knowledge production. What distinguishes New Institutionalism from the work of Smithson, Asher, and Group Material, however, is that curators themselves began to

play a definitive role in questioning the aims, functions, and methods of the institution, exploring and expanding its impact on the shaping of knowledge derived from art and exhibitions. In their scrutiny of the social, economic, and physical structure of the art institution, these inquiries resemble those of Conceptual artists identified with institutional critique from the early 1970s to the 1990s. But, whereas institutional critique generally pitted the artist against the institution, on a temporary basis confined to exhibition parameters and catalogues, New Institutionalism absorbs this mode of inquiry as a continuous form of autocritique from within the very borders of the institution.

OSLO, NORWAY, 2003

NARRATOR New Institutionalism was the subject of the first in a series of thematic journals published by Office for Contemporary Art Norway. Edited by Norwegian curator and writer Jonas Ekeberg, the inaugural issue titled *Versted*, or “Workshop,” set out to historicize and categorize a selection of exhibitions, institutions, and biennials alongside a history of Conceptual Art and institutional critique. The term “New Institutionalism” had previously been applied to the fields of economics, sociology, and even Christianity. It signaled a renewed confidence in institutions. Ekeberg applied it to activity occurring at art institutions at the time, mostly in Europe, such as the now-defunct Rooseum in Malmö, the Palais de Tokyo, and Bergen Kunsthall, institutions that...

JONAS EKEBERG ...seemed at last to be ready to let go, not only of the limited discourse of the work of art as a mere object, but also of the whole institutional framework that went with it, a framework that the 'extended' field of contemporary art had simply inherited from high modernism, along with its white cube, its top down attitude of curators and directors, its links to certain (insider) audiences, and so on and so forth.

KUNSTVEREIN MÜNCHEN, 2002

NARRATOR In Munich, in 2002, Maria Lind launched a project called Sputnik, a collaborative framework intended to reshape institutional functions of the museum. Taking its name and concept from the Russian word meaning "traveling companion" or "partner," the project comprised a group of 16 visiting artists, curators, and writers who were invited to engage in the long-term planning processes of the institution, each of whom was called a "Sputnik."

Carey Young, Lynne Cooke, Matts Leiderstam, Bik Van der Pol, Jan Verwoert, Apolonija Šušteršič, and Liam Gillick. They were all Sputniks. Their objective: to evaluate the museum's inner workings and recommend interventions in response to how the institution functioned. Over the course of three years, Sputniks accompanied Lind, her curators, and the museum in the production of content, the direction of the institution's programming, and other intricate aspects of its operations, many related to architecture, design, and communication.

MARIA LIND & SPUTNIK Sputniks will be contributing to the shape and character of the Kunstverein with their questions, critiques, advice, and ideas over the next three years. Any one of these relationships may develop into one or any number of additional projects. In these relationships, complete flexibility is of key importance with respect to the particular form any of these potential projects may take. They may take the form of an exhibition, symposium, publication, event or some unplanned format. Whether the project selected should be restricted to a particular time frame or accompany the work of the Kunstverein München over a longer period is also to remain flexible.

The projects may literally become part of the existing structures and infrastructures of the Kunstverein, thereby exercising an influence on the design and form of the institution itself and contributing anything which might be considered lacking. We would also like to utilize the Sputniks' experience and ideas as a means of discovering how an institution can best operate for artists and for visitors.

NARRATOR One of the Sputniks, Apolonija Šušteršič, re-designed the space on the ground floor of the museum. Originating with the intention to activate the museum's entrance by encouraging more sustained possibilities for an underused space, Šušteršič's worked titled *Entrance* consisted of an arrangement of comfortable chairs and tables for visitors to relax on. She inserted a coffee bar at which people could meet, and a workstation the museum's curatorial staff took turns manning, performing their administrative functions in the

public realm while acting as a kind of welcome center-cum-lounge for museum visitors. The installation established a tone of conviviality and openness at the entrance into the institution, projecting the sense of hospitality and generosity to be experienced throughout the remainder of it.

New Institutionalism reflects the increasingly porous parameters in the division of labor assigned to the artist and the curator. Curators, indeed, began to play significant roles in conceiving creative ideas, while artists began to fulfill roles of organizer and strategist, often invited by an institution to challenge its structure or asked to solve a problem in the social, urban, and economic life of the surrounding community.

DE APPEL READER, 2005

LIAM GILLICK My involvement in the critical space is a legacy of what happened when a semi-autonomous critical voice started to become weak, and one of the reasons that happened was that curating became a dynamic process. So people you might have met before, who in the past were critics were now curators. The brightest, smartest people get involved in this multiple activity of being mediator, producer, interface and neo-critic. It is arguable that the most important essays about art over the last ten years have not been in art magazines but they have been in catalogues and other material produced around galleries, art centers and exhibitions.

NARRATOR And so, if the art

institution adopts the critical voice once maintained by artists, how do the exhibition and the institution, the outlets of distribution remain alive, relevant, and vocal—for the artist?

FRIEZE, 2006

ALEX FARQUHARSON New Institutionalism, and much recent art, side-steps the problem of the white cube altogether. If white-walled rooms are the site for exhibitions one week, a recording studio or political workshop the next, then it is no longer the container that defines the contents as art, but the contents that determine the identity of the container.

Reception, similarly, refutes the white cube ideal of the individual viewer's inaudible monologue, and is instead dialogic and participatory. Discussion events are rarely at the service of exhibitions at 'new institutions'; either they tend to take the form of autonomous programming streams, or else exhibitions themselves take a highly dialogic mode, giving rise to new curatorial hybrids.

NARRATOR The complex overlaps between relational art and New Institutionalism speak to the parallel developments of these two forms of exhibition occurring, at the time, mostly in Europe, in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Both aimed at reconfiguring the exhibition of art inside the modernist gallery into something more active, democratic, open, and egalitarian than merely the displaying of objects. It has been a long and difficult march against the white cube and the authority of the art institution it symbolizes. Somehow, practitioners of relational

art and New Institutionalism believed it was finally possible to change it. Perhaps change seemed more plausible if the artist and the curator mounted a critique together on two fronts.

TATE MODERN, 2006

In 2006, Maria Lind and Alex Farquharson stood on the balcony of the Tate Modern talking about the parallel developments of relational art and New Institutionalism.

ALEX FARQUHARSON To me, Liam Gillick, Jorge Pardo, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Philippe Parreno, for example, are neither object makers nor installation artists. The medium is the exhibition. That, rather than social engagement, will come to be seen as their most distinctive contribution to art history.

NARRATOR Both relational art and New Institutionalism make a clear connection with the exhibition and therefore their activity as operating within the realm of art. This activity does not try to evacuate art to unite with everyday life, instead it relies upon and utilizes the exhibition form and art's critical potential within it. In *Relational Aesthetics* Nicolas Bourriaud champions this activity and its connection with the spectator because he sees relational art further compromising the modernist project, believing that artists working with relational forms saw the work as an opportunity to "spread their wings."

The result: socially engaged and participatory work now occurs in city streets, grassy fields, or markets

without a need for recognition by the institution and its discourses. Art that generally falls under the rubric of "social practice" has developed out of this conflation of a desire to make the world a better place and often the notion of using the spectator to do so. It does not always require the context of art to gauge its capacity—as art.

With the question of one's capacity to gauge something as art, let's return to Tony Smith's account of his drive on the New Jersey Turnpike.

TONY SMITH The experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art. Most paintings look pretty pictorial after that. There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it.

NARRATOR But, if "you just have to experience it" how does one engage with questions about the aesthetic qualities, the value of that experience. This is the crux set in motion with the introduction of time and space, the introduction of the spectator's completion of the work introduced by Smithson with his non-sites, and the thing Fried so urgently worried about in "Art and Objecthood."

Fried isn't the only one. Other critics have voiced concern about holding art accountable as art. Claire Bishop believes that the artistic intention of causal effect that describes participation—or social practice—dissolves art's capacity for criticality.

CLAIRE BISHOP The discursive criteria of socially engaged art are, at present, drawn from a tacit analogy between anticapitalism and the

Christian "good soul." In this schema, self-sacrifice is triumphant: The artist should renounce authorial presence in favor of allowing participants to speak through him or her. This self-sacrifice is accompanied by the idea that art should extract itself from the "useless" domain of the aesthetic and be fused with social praxis.

As the French philosopher Jacques Rancière has observed, this denigration of the aesthetic ignores the fact that the system of art as we understand it in the West—the "aesthetic regime of art" inaugurated by Friedrich Schiller and the Romantics and still operative to this day—is predicated precisely on a confusion between art's autonomy (its position at one remove from instrumental rationality) and heteronomy (its blurring of art and life). Untangling this knot—or ignoring it by seeking more concrete ends for art—is slightly to miss the point, since the aesthetic is, according to Rancière, the ability to think contradiction: the productive contradiction of art's relationship to social change, characterized precisely by that tension between faith in art's autonomy and belief in art as inextricably bound to the promise of a better world to come. For Rancière the aesthetic doesn't need to be sacrificed at the altar of social change, as it already inherently contains this ameliorative promise.

NARRATOR Bourriaud, too, in his 2001 follow-up publication *Postproduction* argues that *Relational Aesthetics* was intended to situate and find common ground for this kind of work that solicits the spectator. He did not intend *Relational Aesthetics* to become a benchmark for characterizing all art

that engages socially. But to some extent that is what happened. His objective was to offer new aesthetic criteria for assessing the work, tools that reached beyond Fried's modernist sensibilities of aesthetics.

POST- PRODUCTION, 2001

NICOLAS BOURRIAUD *Relational Aesthetics* was content to paint the new sociopolitical landscape of the nineties, to describe the collective sensibility on which contemporary artistic practices were beginning to rely. The success of this essay, which—alas—has at times generated a sort of caricatured vulgate ('artists-who-serve-soup-at-the-opening,' etc.), stems essentially from the fact that it was a 'kick start' to contemporary aesthetics, beyond the fascination with communication and new technologies then being talked about incessantly, and above all, beyond the predetermined grids of reading (Fluxus, in particular) into which these artists' works were being placed. *Relational Aesthetics* was the first work, to my knowledge, to provide the theoretical tools that allowed one to analyze works by individuals who would soon become irrefutably present on the international scene.

NARRATOR Relational art is corrupted by a profound misreading of *Relational Aesthetics* by artists whose work is billed as "social practice" and "participation." Social practice can have a tendency to skim the surface of Bourriaud's theoretical depth, giving rise to a CliffsNotes version of *Relational*

Aesthetics, because if not attentive it concentrates too much on the social and not enough on the search for new aesthetic criteria. By focusing only on participation, for instance, this interpretation has cleaved aesthetics from its equally important position in Bourriaud's theory. Adding to this misconstrual, participatory art is increasingly exploited by a museum industry that thrives on the production of experiences to entertain its visitors.

THE NEW MUSEUM, NEW YORK, 2012

NARRATOR Fast-forward to 2012: Carsten Höller's exhibition *Experience* at the New Museum.

Experience marked the artist's first large-scale survey in an American museum. Höller is one of the leading artists of the 1990s generation categorized under "relational aesthetics." He has consistently produced work that seeks to engender new relationships between art, spectator, and institution through the experiences he stages.

In the New Museum exhibition this intent was dramatically realized in a number of ways, including the work *Untitled (Slide)*, a stainless steel and polycarbonate tube that sliced through two levels of the museum. Spectators queued up in the fourth-floor gallery. Once they reached the small mouth of the slide projecting out of the floor, they crouched into it by holding tightly to its edge and inserting their feet and legs into the pocket of a canvas pouch. An

attendant signaled to release, after which spectators dropped down a steep incline, twisting and turning through the third-floor gallery space, barely seeing anything outside the clear plastic tube as they zoomed along. They settled into a cushioned halt in the second-floor gallery. Another attendant took the canvas pouch, and the rider quickly jumped up and moved aside before the next one ejected.

Before visitors entered *Experience*, they were required to sign a liability waiver for the 102-foot slide. When they were finally in line for it, a wall text provided another abbreviated warning—the work should be used with caution.

WARNING

Do not use *Untitled (Slide)* if:

- You are, or think you may be, pregnant.
- You have heart, respiratory, neck, or back conditions.
- You are affected by motion sickness, acrophobia (fear of height), vertigo (dizziness), or claustrophobia (fear of confined spaces).
- You are particularly susceptible to bruising, sprains, or fractures.

Twenty-seven more works of art awaited their engagement. These included *Mirror Carousel*, a full-scale merry-go-round of hanging swings; *Singing Canaries Mobile*, a work of seven metal birdcages hovering overhead with live yellow canaries making song; spectators wearing *Upside-Down Goggles* wandering aimlessly in an inverted world of distortion; *Giant Psycho Tank*, a sensory deprivation chamber for spectators to float in a heated pool of water filled with salt, like the Dead Sea.

NARRATOR How did we arrive at this moment in contemporary art where there are legal waivers, helmets, warnings, and queuing up in a museum for experiences that can be had better and more cheaply at a county fair or suburban waterpark? In this case, one might say it is Carsten Höller's fault since the New Museum evidently disavowed responsibility for the visitor's experience. It is, after all, his art. The New Museum and countless other large museums and biennials around the world, however, are part of the industry of contemporary art. This industry defines and disperses what the general public knows is contemporary art. It operates like any other industry—technology, filmmaking, music, medicine, design, and so forth. Its operations function within the same neoliberalist market mentality, and its mandate is to do precisely what Höller did for the New Museum: create an experience for the consumer. That consumer is the spectator.

OCTOBER JOURNAL, 1990

In her 1990 essay "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," Rosalind Krauss draws parallels between recent activity in contemporary art and the logic of advanced capitalism. She recalls a story told to her by Thomas Krens, former director of the Guggenheim Museum, about a drive he took on the German Autobahn.

ROSALIND KRAUSS It was a November day in 1985, and having just seen a spectacular gallery made from a converted factory building, he was driving by

large numbers of other factories. Suddenly, he said, he thought of the huge abandoned factories in his own neighborhood of North Adams, and he had the revelation of MASS MoCA. Significantly, he described this revelation as transcending anything like the mere availability of real estate. Rather, he said, it announced an entire change. ...A profound and sweeping change, that is, within the very conditions within which art itself is understood.

NARRATOR This understanding, she continues...

ROSALIND KRAUSS ...would forego history in the name of a kind of intensity of experience, an aesthetic charge that is not so much temporal (historical) as it is now radically spatial, the model for which, in Krens's own account, was, in fact, Minimalism. It is Minimalism, Krens says in relation to his revelation, that has reshaped the way we, as late-twentieth-century viewers, look at art: the demands we now put on it; our need to experience it along with its interaction with the space in which it exists; our need to have a cumulative, serial, crescendo towards the intensity of this experience; our need to have more and at a larger scale.

NARRATOR While the shift away from Fried's modernist aesthetic criteria initiated a release from the grips of his modernist orthodoxy, it consequently catapulted the spectator into a transformative function of the work of art and opened the door...

ROSALIND KRAUSS ...to let that whole world of late capitalist production right back in, eventually inserting it into another function—

this one economic—of advanced capitalism.

NARRATOR As we recall, in the 1966 *Artforum* interview, Tony Smith describes a similar revelation about art while taking another drive—this one on the New Jersey Turnpike in the 1950s.

TONY SMITH The experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art.

NARRATOR Minimalism may not have brought an end to art, but it did introduce the spatial and temporal into the making, evaluating, and understanding it. Minimalism expanded perceptions of art beyond pure visuality to encompass bodily involvement, and that incorporation of the spectator disrupted a modernist criteria based on medium specificity and visual immediacy.

The newfound freedom from these modernist aesthetics “undergirded” the rise of Minimalism, but it also introduced other problems for understanding and assessing the aesthetic qualities of this new art. When Robert Smithson extended the spectator’s involvement in art to encompass the spatial and temporal contexts of the gallery, he pushed further the role of the spectator prompted by Minimalism. Krens’s premonition anticipated the instrumentalization of that spectator in this long corporate turn in contemporary art and exhibitions.

The work of Höller and other artists and curators of his generation associated with relational art and New Institutionalism set forth many different possibilities and futures for

art and its institutions. They saw the exhibition as a viable form through which fluidity, unpredictability, confusion, and instability in art could be inserted and leveraged. Their use of social forms in exhibitions attempted to break free from institutional constructs, only to become entangled in others: as fuel for the industries of museum and biennial entertainment, municipal economies, and cultural tourism. The critique originally posed by artists, curators, and institutions in their aim to rethink the exhibition as a critical form by engaging the spectator differently began to operate within the cultural logic of advanced capitalism. Their work became diluted and absorbed into a representation of the critique that it originally posed.

So, as we begin to historicize the art of the 1990s and early 2000s and grapple with its genealogy, we realize the need to continually question the viability of critical forms of art—and march toward new ones. We should not forget that art has the capacity to change the appearance of things and, in turn, the perspective of spectators, and that is what gives it political—critical—potential. By building upon developments of the late 1960s, we were led to radically question the role and purpose of art and its institutions. Today, we are again at a crossroads and with the continued need to question, so that criticality remains alive, relevant, and potent in the face of new incursions.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Julie Ault (b. 1957) is an American artist, curator, critic and cofounder of the collaborative Group Material, active from 1979 to 1996. She is editor of *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material* (2010) and author of numerous essays addressing in part the predicaments of critical practices contributing to the institutions and visual culture they critique.

Claire Bishop (b. 1971) is a British art historian and critic whose book *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012) provides the first historical and theoretical account of socially engaged art. Her *October* essay “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics” (2004) remains a hallmark critique of participatory art practices.

Nicolas Bourriaud (born 1965) is a French curator and art critic. A cofounder of the esteemed Palais de Tokyo (1999), he is author of *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) a compilation of essays reflecting on selected artistic activity of the 1990s relying on social forms as integral to the work.

Jonas Ekeberg (b. 1967) is a Norwegian curator, writer and chief editor of the Nordic online art journal *Kunstkritikk*. He was curator at Office for Contemporary Art Norway (2002–04) where he was editor of the journal *Verksted #1* (2003), which focused on New Institutionalism and institutional critique.

Alex Farquharson (b. 1969) is an English curator and critic. He is Director of Tate Britain, previously serving as Director of Nottingham Contemporary (2007–15). His important essays on curating include “Bureaux de change” (*Frieze*, 2006); “Curator and Artist” (*Arts Monthly*, 2003); and “I curate we curate you curate” (*Arts Monthly*, 2003).

Michael Fried (b. 1939) is an American art critic and art historian whose work has contributed widely to a discourse on modernist art and other areas of art history. His extraordinarily influential essay “Art and Objecthood” (1967) has impacted the work of generations of artists and writers.

Liam Gillick (b. 1964) is an English conceptual artist. Participating in the seminal exhibition *Traffic* (1996) at the Palais de Tokyo, curated by Nicolas Bourriaud, Gillick’s wide-ranging practice combines design, writing, performance and architecture to excavate the lingering effects of modernist ideologies on contemporary art and culture.

Rosalind Krauss (b. 1941) is an American art critic and theorist. Recognized as a leading voice in scholarship on 20th-century painting, sculpture, and photography, her essays such as “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” (1979) remains an influential text mapping a history of the intersections among art, architecture and visual culture.

Miwon Kwon (b. 1961) is a Korean-American curator and art historian. Her work focuses on contemporary, land and site-specific art. The author of *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002), she provides a theoretical framework for analyzing context-based art since the 1960s.

Maria Lind (b. 1966) is a Swedish curator and writer. She is the director of Tensta Konsthall, and artistic director of the 11th Gwangju Biennale (2016). Her book *Selected Maria Lind Writing* (2010) is a compendium of her insightful essays written between 1997 and 2010.

Robert Morris (b. 1931) is an American sculptor, conceptual artist and writer. A prominent theorist and proponent of the underlying concepts of Minimalism, his *Artforum* essays “Notes on Sculpture” (1966) ushered through a wave of creative activity contributing to the development of performance, land, and process-based art.

Tony Smith (1912–1980) was an American sculptor and architectural designer, and a noted theorist on art. His sculpture *Die* (1962), a six-foot steel cube, was instrumental in the rise of Minimalism.

Robert Smithson (1938–1973) was an American artist and pioneer of combining photography and sculpture into singular works of art. A prolific writer and critic, his essays and land art including the celebrated *Spiral Jetty* (1970) promoted artistic and creative activity beyond the walls of art institutions.

BEYOND OBJECTHOOD THE EXHIBITION AS A CRITICAL FORM SINCE 1968

You Just Have to Experience It is produced on the occasion of the launch *Beyond Objecthood: The Exhibition as a Critical Form since 1968* written by James Voorhies and published by MIT Press.

In 1968, Robert Smithson reacted to Michael Fried’s influential essay “Art and Objecthood” with a series of works called non-sites. While Fried described the spectator’s connection with a work of art as a momentary visual engagement, Smithson’s non-sites asked spectators to do something more: to take time looking, walking, seeing, reading, and thinking about the combination of objects, images, and texts installed in a gallery. In *Beyond Objecthood*, James Voorhies traces a genealogy of spectatorship through the rise of the exhibition as a critical form—and artistic medium. Artists like Smithson, Group Material, and Michael Asher sought to reconfigure and expand the exhibition and the museum into something more active, open, and democratic, by inviting spectators into new and unexpected encounters with works of art and institutions. This practice was sharply critical of the ingrained characteristics long associated with art institutions and conventional exhibition-making; and yet, Voorhies finds, over time the critique has been diluted by efforts of the very institutions that now gravitate to the “participatory.”

Beyond Objecthood focuses on innovative figures, artworks, and institutions that pioneered the exhibition as a critical form, tracing its evolution through the activities of curator Harald Szeemann, relational art, and New Institutionalism. Voorhies examines recent artistic and curatorial work by Liam Gillick, Thomas Hirschhorn, Carsten Höller, Maria Lind, Apolonija Šušteršič, and others, at such institutions as Documenta, e-flux, Manifesta, and Office for Contemporary Art Norway, and he considers the continued potential of the exhibition as a critical form in a time when the differences between art and entertainment increasingly blur.

James Voorhies (b. 1970) is an American curator, art historian, and founder of Bureau for Open Culture. He is Dean of Fine Arts and Associate Professor of Contemporary Art at California College of the Arts in San Francisco where he oversees graduate and undergraduate programs in the fine arts.

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BUREAU FOR OPEN CULTURE

Bureau for Open Culture is a curatorial practice, philosophy and strategy that inhabits and connects with institutions, designers and publishers to realize projects with artists and writers. The projects forge intersections among art, design, education, and consumer culture to rethink how institutions address and engage spectators.

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