

There's no place like home

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It is difficult for me to imagine that I have much to contribute to this exhibition or its catalogue, with their aim of offering a survey of art of the past two years. I have not been looking at art in galleries or museums much for a number of years now, or reading much in art publications. I can draw on my previous years of studying the art world as an “institutional critic,” as well as my ongoing work with young artists in academic contexts, but I can’t help but doubt the relevance of my increasingly removed perspective for an audience of more actively engaged participants. I can rationalize this remove as stemming from my alienation from the art world and its hypocrisies, which I have made a career out of attempting to expose. I have ascribed to institutional critique the role of judging the institution of art against the critical claims of its legitimizing discourses, its self-representation as a site of contestation and its narratives of radicality and revolution. The glaring, persistent, and seemingly ever-growing disjunction between those legitimizing discourses—above all in their critical and political claims—and the social conditions of art generally, as well as of my own work specifically, has appeared to me as profoundly and painfully contradictory, even as fraudulent. Increasingly, I have turned to sociology, psychoanalysis, and economic research, rather than to art and cultural theory, to understand and work through these contradictions. Nevertheless, it has gotten to the point that most forms of engagement with the art world have become so fraught with conflict for me that they are almost unbearable, even as I struggle to find ways to continue to participate.

Writing this essay and the prospect of contributing to the 2012 Whitney Biennial are no exception. As I begin working on this text, the Occupy Wall Street movement is spreading across the United States and beyond. Along with many of what is most certainly an overwhelming majority of artists, curators, art critics, and historians who profess a progressive if not radically left political orientation, I have been looking for ways to support and participate in this movement and believe it represents a long overdue expression of collective revulsion over the excesses of the financial industry, the corruption of our political process, and the economic policies that have produced levels of inequality in the United States not seen since the 1920s. Indeed, the Occupy movement seems to be taking the art world by storm, especially in New York, with dozens of symposia, lectures, and teach-ins as well as Occupy-themed or inspired artists groups and protests at art-related sites. Who knows where this movement will be four months from now when this essay is published. I find myself asking, however, where was it four months ago? Why did it take an art world that prides itself on criticality and vanguardism so long to confront its direct complicity in economic conditions that have been evident for more than a decade now?

A few days ago, there was a march through the streets of Manhattan’s Upper East Side, with stops in front of the residences of various billionaires. I was visiting New York from Los Angeles but tied up with Whitney-related meetings, so I didn’t join in.

Did protestors stop in front of the homes of any of the Whitney Museum’s patrons or trustees?

I consider a few of the Whitney’s patrons to be friends, even family, and feel deeply and personally indebted to their support of some of the Museum’s programs. One of these programs in particular, the Whitney Independent Study Program, has been a home for me since I was in my teens—one of the few homes I feel that I have ever had. It is unlikely that the particular Whitney patrons whom I know personally would appear on the radar of social justice activists (being only millionaires and not billionaires), although there are certainly other museum trustees and contemporary art collectors who have. But this does not make the situation any less fraught for me: the direct and intimate conflict I feel between my personal and professional allegiance with the Museum and some of its patrons and staff, and the political, intellectual, and artistic commitments that drive my “institutional critique,” have contributed significantly to my difficulty in writing this essay.

IT IS WIDELY KNOWN that private equity managers and other financial industry executives emerged as major collectors of contemporary art early in the last decade and now make up a large percentage of the top collectors worldwide. They also emerged as a major presence on museum boards. Many of these collectors and trustees from the financial world were directly involved in the sub-prime mortgage crisis—a few are now under federal investigation. Many others have been vocal opponents of financial reform as well as any increase in taxation or public spending in response to the recession they precipitated, and have pursued these positions through contributions to politicians and political groups, with some giving generously to both parties.¹

More broadly, it is clear that the contemporary art world has been a direct beneficiary of the inequality of which the outsized rewards of Wall Street are only the most visible example. A quick look at the Gini Index, which tracks inequality worldwide, reveals that the locations of the biggest art booms of the last

decade have also seen the steepest rise in inequality: the United States, Britain, China, and, most recently, India. Recent economic research has linked the steep increase in art prices over the past decades directly to this growing inequality, indicating that “a one percentage point increase in the share of total income earned by the top 0.1% triggers an increase in art prices of about 14 percent.”² And we can assume that this hyperinflation in art prices, typical of how luxury goods and services respond to increases in concentrations of wealth, has also catapulted an unprecedented number of art dealers, consultants, and artists themselves into the ranks of the top 1, .1, and even .01 percent of earners, with the reported prices of many artworks well above \$344,000, the 2009 threshold for 1 percent status.³

Indeed, the art world itself has developed into a prime example of a winner-take-all market, one of the economic models that emerged to describe the extremes of compensation that have become endemic in the financial and corporate worlds and now also extend to major museums and other large nonprofit organizations in the United States, where compensation ratios can rival those of the for-profit sector.⁴ At all levels of the art world, one finds extreme wealth breezing past grinding poverty, from the archetypal struggling artist to the often temporary and benefitless studio and gallery assistants to the low-wage staffers at nonprofit organizations. Museums plead poverty in negotiations with workers and leave curators to scramble for exhibition budgets and often-meager artist and author fees, while raising hundreds of millions for big-name acquisitions and expansions, which proceed in many institutions despite the continuing recession.⁵

And it is not only big museums and the art market that have benefitted from the enormous concentrations of wealth that have risen with inequality in the past decades. Given the steady decline of public funding for the arts since the 1980s, it is clear that this private wealth also financed much of the boom of smaller nonprofits, artist-run and alternative spaces, as well as a still-growing number of art foundations, prizes, and residencies. Under the U.S. system of providing a tax deduction on contributions to organizations, this private support for cultural institutions has amounted to a substantial indirect public subsidy. The corresponding loss in tax revenues may be negligible compared to the losses from other deductions and loopholes that have contributed significantly both to inequality and the impoverishment of our public sector, but it is a loss nevertheless, and one that has grown apace with the market value of artworks donated to museums.⁶

However, it has been during this same period of inequality-fueled art world expansion that we have also seen a growing number of artists, curators, and critics take up the cause of social justice—often within organizations funded by corporate sponsorship and private wealth. We have seen a proliferation of degree programs focusing on social, political, critical, and community-based art practices—based mostly in private nonprofit and even for-profit art schools that charge among the highest tuitions of any masters-level degree programs. We have seen art magazines take up apparently radical political theory and even a critique of the art market—while weighted down with advertising for commercial galleries, art fairs, auction houses, and luxury goods. We have seen museums embrace the discourse and even functions of public service—while the charitable deduction from which they benefit reduces public coffers, while they attract private donors away from social-service charities,⁷ and while many of their patrons actively lobby for a shrinking public sector. We have seen artworks identified with social and even economic

critique sell for hundreds of thousands and even millions of dollars. And we have seen critical, social, and political claims for what art is and does proliferate, becoming central to art’s dominant legitimizing discourse.

We also have seen a proliferation of theories and practices that aim to account for these contradictions, or to confront them from within, or to escape them by proposing or creating alternatives. I myself have long argued that the critical and political potential of art lies in its very embeddedness in a deeply conflictual social field, which can only be confronted effectively *in situ*. From this perspective it would seem that the apparent contradictions between the critical and political claims of art and its economic conditions are not contradictions at all but rather attest to the vitality of the art world as a site of critique and contestation, as these practices develop in scope and complexity to confront the challenges of globalization, neoliberalism, post-Fordism, new regimes of spectacle, the debt crisis, right-wing populism, and now historic levels of inequality. And if some or even most of these practices prove ineffectual, or readily absorbed, with their truly radical elements marginalized or quickly outmoded, new theories and strategies immediately emerge in their place—in an ongoing process that now seems to serve as one of the art world’s primary motors of content production.

With each passing year, however, rather than diminishing the art world’s contradictions, these theories and practices only seem to expand along with them.

The diversity and complexity brought about by art-world expansion itself makes it perilous to generalize about such efforts. While I believe that we still can speak of “the art world” as a singular field, this expansion has led to the growth and coalescence of increasingly distinct artistic subfields, each defined by particular economies as well as configurations of practices, institutions, and values. There are the art worlds that revolve around commercial art galleries, art fairs, and auctions; the art worlds that revolve around curated exhibitions and projects in public and nonprofit organizations; the art worlds that revolve around academic institutions and discourses; and there are the community-based, activist, and DIY art worlds that aspire to exist outside of all these organized sites of activity, and, in some cases, even outside of the art world itself. At their extremes, participants in these subfields may indeed escape some of the art world’s contradictions, although certainly not those of the world at large: there are those who feel at home with wealth and privilege, for whom art is a luxury business or an investment opportunity and perhaps not much more, as well as those who see art as a purely aesthetic domain in which the political and economic should play no part. And there are those who see art as social activism and who have nothing to do with commercial galleries and art fairs, society openings, gala benefits, and privately funded museums. Most of us, however, and most of the art world, exist uncomfortably and often painfully in between these extremes, embodying and performing the contradictions between them and the economic and political conflicts those contradictions reflect, unable to resolve them within our work or within ourselves, much less within our field.

Art discourse—which includes not only what critics, curators, artists, and art historians write about art, but what we say about what we do in the art field, in all its forms—seems to play a double role in this expanded and increasingly fragmented art world. As a critical discourse, it often proposes to describe these conditions and contradictions, account for them, and even to

provide the tools to resolve them. At the same time, however, it remains largely and broadly shared, often traversing the most diverse art institutions, economies, and communities without any significant alteration in artistic, critical, and political claims or theoretical frame of reference. In this way, art discourse serves to maintain links among artistic subfields and to create a continuum between practices that may be completely incommensurable in terms of their economic conditions and social as well as artistic values. This may make art discourse one of the most consequential—and problematic—institutions in the art world today, along with mega-museums that aim to be all things to all people and survey exhibitions (like the Whitney Biennial) that offer up incomparable practices for comparison.

It is not only the immaterial character of art discourse that predisposes it to this function and mode of operation. Rather, it is the consistent tendency of art discourse to segregate the social and economic conditions of art from what it articulates as constitutive of the meaning, significance, and experience of artworks, as well as what it articulates as the motivations of artists, curators, and critics, even when it asserts that art is acting on these very conditions. While this is not surprising in the perspectives of those who view art as a purely aesthetic domain—and who even may make political arguments for art's autonomy as such—it seems increasingly symptomatic in an art world ever more intently focused on producing effects in the “real world” and on seeing art as an agent of social critique, if not of social change. The result has been an ever-widening gap between the material conditions of art and its symbolic systems: between what the vast majority of artworks *are* today (socially and economically) and what artists, curators, critics, and historians say that artworks—especially their own work or work they support—*do* and *mean*.

It now seems that the primary site of barriers between “art” and “life,” between the aesthetic and epistemic forms that constitute art's symbolic systems and the practical and economic relations that constitute its social conditions, are not the physical spaces of art objects, as critics of the museum have often suggested, but the discursive spaces of art history and criticism, artists statements, and curatorial texts. Formal, procedural, and iconographic investigation and performative experimentation are elaborated as figures of radical social and even economic critique, while the social and economic conditions of the works themselves and of their production and reception are completely ignored or recognized only in the most euphemized ways. Even when these conditions are specifically conceptualized by artists as the subject matter and material of their work, they tend to be reduced in art discourse to elements of a symbolic rather than practical system, interpreted as representative of a particular artistic position, to be evaluated in contrast to other artistic positions, usually according to a theoretical framework which itself is being proposed in contrast to some other theoretical framework.⁸

Indeed, much of what is written about art now seems to me to be almost delusional in the grandiosity of its claims for social impact and critique, particularly given its often total disregard of the reality of art's social conditions. The broad and often unquestioned claims that art in some way critiques, negates, questions, challenges, confronts, contests, subverts, or transgresses norms, conventions, hierarchies, relations of power and domination, or other social structures—usually by reproducing them in an exaggerated, displaced, or otherwise distanced, alienated, or estranged way—seem to have developed into little more than a rationale for some of the most cynical forms of col-

laboration with some of the most corrupt and exploitative forces in our society.⁹ Even more perniciously, perhaps, we also often reproduce in art discourse the dissociation of power and domination from material conditions of existence that has become endemic to our national political discourse and has contributed to the marginalization of labor and class-based struggles. With this, we may also collude in the enormously successful culture war that, for a wide swath of the U.S. population, has effectively identified class privilege and hierarchy with cultural and educational rather than economic capital, and which has facilitated the success of right-wing populists in convincing this population to vote for its own dispossession and impoverishment.

MANY YEARS AGO, I turned to the work of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu for an account of art's social conditions, and found an account of their particular relationship with its symbolic systems as well. As Bourdieu asks in the opening pages of *The Rules of Art*:

What indeed is this discourse which speaks of the social or psychological world *as if it did not speak of it*; which *cannot speak* of this world except on condition that it only speak of it as if it did not speak of it, that is, in a *form* which performs, for the author and the reader, a *denegation* (in the Freudian sense of *Verneinung*) of what it expresses?¹⁰

Among the aims of Bourdieu's work on cultural fields was to develop an alternative to purely internal and external readings of art—to those who take art as an autonomous phenomenon whose meaning derives only from immanent structures, and those who see art only as a manifestation of social, economic, or psychological forces. Here and elsewhere, however, Bourdieu suggests that the “denial of the social world” in cultural discourse is not just a matter of attending to the genuine logic of art or of avoiding the trap of a reductive or schematic social determinism. Rather, he suggests that this negation (*dénégation* in French) of the social and its determination is central to art and its discourse and even may be the genuine logic of artistic phenomena itself—and thus, any “external” reading that simply reduces art to social conditions, without taking into account its specific negation of those conditions, would fail to understand anything about art at all.

With regard to art as a social field, Bourdieu evokes negation in connection with a “bad faith ... denial of the economy,” which, he argues, is a correlate to one of the conditions of art as a relatively autonomous field: that is, its capacity to exclude or invert what he calls the dominant principle of hierarchization (which, under capitalism, is economic value).¹¹ More broadly, he describes the aesthetic disposition—the modes of perception and appreciation capable of both recognizing and constituting objects and practices as works of art—as a “generalized capacity to neutralize ordinary urgencies and to bracket off practical ends.” He argues that this artistic tendency to distance and “exclude any ‘naïve’ reaction—horror at the horrible, desire for the desirable, pious reverence for the sacred—along with all purely ethical responses, in order to concentrate solely upon the mode of representation, the style, perceived and appreciated by comparison to other styles, is one dimension of a total relation to the world and to others, a life-style, in which the effects of particular conditions of existence are expressed in a ‘misrecognizable’ form.”¹²

In Bourdieu's analysis, those conditions of existence “are characterized by the suspension and removal of economic necessity.” What this distancing thus performs is an “affirma-

tion of power over a dominated necessity”—over need that may be a consequence of economic domination or impoverishment, but which also itself exists as a form of domination in that it may determine our actions and thus limits our freedom and autonomy. While this aesthetic neutralization of urgencies and ends may appear as a radical rejection of economic rationality and domination, historically achieved by artists through sacrifice and struggle, it also corresponds to the freedom from need afforded by economic privilege. And it is this dimension of the aesthetic that Bourdieu finds the specifically artistic principle underlying the objective collusion, manifest in the art market and in private nonprofit museums, between apparently radical artistic positions and those of economic elites.

In some respects, this is one of those aspects of Bourdieu's work that may appear woefully out of date. Art and art discourse have become increasingly focused on social and psychological functions and effects, as more and more artists, curators, and critics endeavor to escape the boundaries of the artistic and aesthetic and to reintegrate art and life, to serve social needs, to produce authentic emotional relationships, to embrace performativity, to liberate the spectator, to act in and on urban space, and to transform all manner of social, economic, and interpersonal structures. Art discourse no longer speaks of the social and psychological world *as if it did not speak of it*. It speaks of that world incessantly, especially in its economic aspects: financial and affective. And yet, it seems to me, to a very large extent, it speaks of that world *so as not to speak of it*, still, again, in forms that *perform* a negation in a Freudian sense quite specifically—and not only of the economic.

I was always struck that Bourdieu, apparently no fan of psychoanalysis, turned to Freud when it came to accounting for literary and artistic fields and especially their discourse. With his reference to negation “in the Freudian sense,” he invites us to consider the operations of the aesthetic disposition, as well as the conditions of the artistic field and our investments in it, in terms of subjective as well as social structures. Freud describes negation as a procedure through which “the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness,” even resulting in “full intellectual acceptance”; and yet, repression remains in place because this “intellectual function is separated from the affective process.”¹³ As such, negation functions as a mechanism of defense that produces a contradiction on the level of discourse that manifests but also aims to contain a conflict—between opposing impulses or affects; between a wish and a countervailing imperative; or between a wish and a prohibition that negation itself may represent. In addition to functioning as a mechanism of defense, Freud describes negation as central to the development of judgment, not only of good and bad qualities, but also of whether something that is thought exists in reality. Because what is bad, what is alien, and what is external are “to begin with, identical,” negation is a derivative of expulsion.¹⁴ Thus, one can say that what negation performs is a splitting off, externalization, or projection of some part of the self (or, perhaps, any relatively autonomous field) experienced as bad, alien, or external—distancing, above all, our active and affective link with it.

And so, we speak of our interests in social, economic, political, and psychological theory and structures, and in artistic practices that engage these interests as well, or even attempt to engage materially the conditions those theories describe. And yet, those interests—social, psychological, political, economic—generally appear only as what Bourdieu once called “specific, highly sublimated and euphemized interests,”¹⁵ framed as objects of inquiry

or experimentation; of intellectual or artistic investments that are carefully segregated from the very material economic and emotional investments we have in what we do, and from the very real structures and relationships we produce or (more often) reproduce in our activities, be these economic in the political or psychological sense, located in a social or corporal body; isolating the manifest interests of art from the immediate, intimate, and consequent interests that motivate participation in the field, organize investments of energy and resources, and that are linked to specific benefits and satisfactions, as well as to the constant specter of loss, privation, frustration, guilt, shame, and their associated anxiety.

If the artistic negation Bourdieu described indeed functions defensively, in a psychoanalytic sense, then the primary object of those defenses may in fact be the conflicts attendant to the economic conditions of art and our complicity in the economic domination—and spreading impoverishment—that the enormous wealth within the art world represents. Much of art discourse, like art itself today, seems to me to be driven by the struggle to manage and contain the poisonous combination of envy and guilt provoked by that complicity and by participation in the highly competitive, winner-take-all market the art field has become, as well as the shame of being valued as less-than in its precipitous hierarchies. To the extremes of symbolic as well as material rewards within the art field, there corresponds an art discourse that swings between the extremes of a cynicism that disavows guilt, and a critical or political position-taking that disavows competition, envy, and greed; or, between an aestheticism that disavows any interest in the satisfactions such material rewards might offer, and a utopianism that ascribes to itself the power of realizing them by other means; or, between an elitism that would tame envy and guilt by naturalizing entitlement, and a populism that would mollify them with often highly narcissistic and self-serving forms of generosity, from traditional philanthropy to proclamations that “everyone is an artist.”

Increasingly it seems that these positions do not represent alternatives to each other but rather are only vicissitudes of a common structure. They are bound together by their common claim on art and their common contestation of the art world's enormous resources and rewards. Individually and together, they serve to distance and disown aspects of that world, our activities in it, and our investments in those activities that might otherwise render continued participation unbearable. Above all, perhaps, they save us from confronting the social conflicts we live, not only externally but also within ourselves, in our own relative privilege and relative privation, by splitting these positions into idealized and demonized oppositions, to be inhabited or expelled according to their defensive function and the loss, or threat of loss, with which they are associated.

Certainly it is less painful to resolve these conflicts symbolically, in artistic, intellectual, and even political gestures and position-takings, than to resolve them materially—to the marginal extent that it is within our power to do so in our own lives—with choices that would entail sacrifices and renunciations. Even these sacrifices may be preferable, for some, to the pain of wanting what we also hate, and hating what we also are and also love, from the guilt of hurting others with competition, greed, and destructiveness to the fear of envious and retaliatory aggression. And it may be that any form of agency, however ineffectual and illusory or self-denying, is preferable to the anxiety of individual helplessness in the face of overwhelming social as well as psychological forces.

The most prevalent and in some ways effective defenses against the conflicts of the art field, however, may be various forms of detachment and displacement, splitting and projection. We may simply locate those conflicts, or the bad parts of them, elsewhere, in social or physical locations or structures at a safe remove from the art world and our participation in it, which we can then attack or attempt to act upon without challenging our own activities or investments in the art world. This may be true of much of what is considered political and critical art that exists primarily in the art field, as distinct, for example, from activism that may take cultural forms but does not exist primarily in the art field. Conversely, we may locate what is good elsewhere, in a “real world” or “everyday life” imagined as less conflicted or ineffectual and where we also may try to relocate ourselves; or in a whole range of cultures and communities, practices and publics imagined as less fouled with hierarchies and relations of domination and from which art wrongly has been split off. This may be true of much of what is described as social and community-based practices that seek to redeem art vis-à-vis positive social functions. And then we go about the work of reintegration and reconciliation—of art and life, of the specialized and vernacular, of performer and spectator, of individual and collective, of the aesthetic and the social and political, of the self and the object. Ironically, however, we often reconstitute those divisions in the very process of attempting reparation, most obviously by locating these “real” structures and relationships outside of the artistic frame, such that they must be newly constituted and conceptualized as the material or subject matter of art, or reintegrated through practical innovations or theoretical elaborations. It often seems that the very process of the conceptualization of social and psychological structures in art, and above all in the art discourse in which these conceptualizations are articulated, has the consequence of distancing and derealizing them; of splitting them off from the social and psychological relations that we may be producing and reproducing in the very same activities of making and engaging with art.

In fact, however, all art and art institutions, including art discourse, invariably exist within, produce and reproduce, perform or enact structures and relationships that are inseparably formal and phenomenological, semiotic, social, economic, and psychological. All of these structures and relationships simply are always there, in what art is, in what we do and experience with art, in what motivates our engagement with art, just as they are in every other aspect of our lives. Some aspects of these structures and relationships may be conceptualized by artists as the material or content of their work and specifically worked upon, with an intention to reveal or transform them; others may be elaborated by critics, historians, and curators. Most, however, remain implicit, assumed, whether unconscious in the psychoanalytic sense of repressed or simply unthought, even while they may be central to what art is and means socially, as well as to our own interests in and experiences of making or engaging with art as well as in other forms of participation in the art field.

As much as art discourse may reveal structures and relationships to us, it also serves to conceal, with direction and sometimes misdirection; with affirmations accompanied by implicit or explicit negations of other ways of seeing, experiencing, and understanding; with abstraction and formalization that distance and neutralize; or simply through a pervasive silence about aspects of art, our experience of it, and the relationships it performs that, once internalized, may even cause them effectively to disappear for us. Through these operations of art discourse,

we not only banish entire regions of our own activities and experiences, investments, and motivations to insignificance, irrelevance, and unspeakability, we also consistently misrepresent what art is and what we do when we engage with art and participate in the art field.

The politics of artistic phenomena, then, may lie less in which structures and relations are reproduced and enacted or transformed in art than in which of these relations, and our investments in them, we are led to recognize and reflect on, and which we are led to ignore and efface, split off, externalize, or negate. From this perspective, the task of art and especially of art discourse is one of structuring a reflection on precisely those immediate, lived, and invested relations that have been split off and disowned.

Negation, for Freud, is not only a defensive maneuver. It is also a step in the direction of overcoming repression and re-integrating split-off ideas and affects; it is central to the development not only of judgment but also of thought. This may be what Bourdieu had in mind when, after evoking negation “in the Freudian sense,” he goes on to ask “if work on form is not what makes possible the partial anamnesis of deep and repressed structures”; if artists and writers are not “driven to act as a medium of those structures (social and psychological), which then achieve objectification,” passing through them and their work on “inductive words” and “conductive bodies” as well as “more or less opaque screens.” And it may be that art’s capacity to “reveal while veiling” and to “produce a derealizing ‘reality effect’”¹⁶ is not only what makes these structures available for recognition and reflection—and potentially for change—but also what makes this recognition tolerable, perhaps sometimes even pleasurable. In this sense then, the role of crafted, self-consciously and conceptually framed elaborations, objectifications, and enactments of these social and psychological structures is not that of producing an alienation effect or a disinvestment, as many traditions of artistic critique would have it, but rather to provide for just enough distance, just enough not me, just enough sense of agency, to be able to tolerate the raw shame of exposure, the fear or pain of loss, and the trauma of helplessness and subjection, and to be able to recognize and reintegrate the immediate, intimate, and material investments we have in what we do and that lead us to reproduce structures and relationships even while we claim to oppose them.

In order to achieve this recognition and reintegration, however, it finally may be necessary to free these operations of negation from those of negative judgment. Toward the end of his essay on negation, Freud famously writes that “in analysis we never discover a ‘no’ in the unconscious”¹⁷—there (as he put it elsewhere) “the category of contraries and contradictories ... is simply disregarded.”¹⁸ The dreaming, imagining, thinking, saying, writing, representing, making, or performing of anything may be taken, first of all, as an affirmation that what is dreamt, imagined, thought, etc., is present within us as a memory, a fantasy, a wish, a representative of an affective state or force, an object that matters to us, or an intra- or intersubjective relationship in which we are, in one way or another, a participant. A negative judgment attached to that idea, object, or relationship is irrelevant with regard to this fundamental fact and indicates only that we feel compelled to distance ourselves from it and to disown it.

Artistic critique and critical discourse have often focused on the conflicts and contradictions of culture and society, including the art world itself. While negations performed as judgments, expressed or implied in various forms of distancing and objec-

tification, might elaborate on such contradictions and take the form of critique, what they signify as negations in a psychoanalytic sense are not conflicts in culture and society but rather conflicts in our selves, which are then manifest as contradictions in our own positions and practices. It may well be the critical agency within our selves that plays the greatest role in maintaining this internal conflict and, thus, in reducing cultural critique to a defensive and reproductive function. By interpreting negations as critique, by responding to judgments of attribution with judgments of attribution, by aggressively attempting to expose conflicts and to strip away defenses in critiques of critiques and negations of negations, critical practices and discourses may often collude in the distancing of affect and the dissimulation of our immediate and active investments in our field.

Instead, perhaps, we should be more like the analysts that Freud describes in the opening paragraph of his essay: “In our interpretation,” he writes, “we take the liberty of disregarding the negation and of picking out the subject-matter alone of the association.”¹⁹ Far from judging negation and the manifest contradictions it may produce as a kind of hypocrisy, fraud, or bad faith, the analyst nods and lets the analyst move on, making note of the forces of repression at work and leaving open the way for further associations that might lead to the relinking of intellectual process and affective investment—and, eventually, to meaningful change. Indeed, it may be that the way out of the seemingly irresolvable contradictions of the art world lies directly within our grasp, not in the next artistic innovation—not, first of all, in what we do—but in what we say about what we do: in art discourse. While a transformation in art discourse would not, of course, resolve any of the enormous conflicts in the social world or even within ourselves, it might at least allow us to engage them more honestly and effectively.

NOTES

This essay is a reworking of, and an attempt at integrating, themes from a few previous essays. These include: “L1% C’est Moi,” *Texte zur Kunst* 83 (September 2011), 114–27; “I am going to tell you what I am not; pay attention, this is exactly what I am,” in Sophie Byrne, ed., *Museum 21: Institution, Idea, Practice* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2011) 82–103; and “Speaking of the social world...,” *Texte zur Kunst* 81 (March 2011), 153–58.

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1. I periodically look up the political contributions made by trustees of major museums. This information is readily available at websites such as CampaignMoney.com. For a brief survey of some of the financial and political activities of top collectors, see my essay “L1% C’est Moi.”

2. William N. Goetzmann, Luc Renneboog, and Christophe Spaenjers, “Art and Money,” Yale School of Management Working Paper No. 09-26, Yale School of Management, April 28, 2010.

3. Damien Hirst, reported by London’s *Sunday Times* to be worth £215 million in 2010, may top the list of wealthy artists. The *Wall Street Journal* has reported estimates that international art dealer Larry Gagosian sells more than \$1 billion in art annually, making it very likely that most if not all of the seventy-seven artists he represents have incomes well above the \$1.4 million threshold for .1 percent status. See Kelly Crow, “The Gagosian Effect,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 1, 2011. (For calculations of income percentile thresholds, see the Tax Foundation, <http://www.taxfoundation.org/news/show/250.html#table7>.)

4. According to *Newsweek*, the highest paid CEOs in the nonprofit sector in 2010 were leaders of cultural organizations, with Zarin Mehta of the New York Philharmonic (at \$2.6 million in total annual compensation) and Glenn Lowry of the Museum of Modern Art (at \$2.5 million) topping the list. Greg Bocquet, “15 Highest-Paid Charity CEOs,” *Newsweek*, October

26, 2010. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the ratio of average CEO total direct compensation to average production worker compensation in the United States was 185 to 1 in 2009. <http://www.stateofworkingamerica.org/charts/view/17>

5. The Whitney Museum recently broke ground on a new building in Manhattan’s Meatpacking District that is estimated to cost \$680 million to complete. The Museum of Modern Art is beginning a fundraising campaign to expand into the former site of the American Folk Art Museum, which it purchased in August 2011 for \$31.2 million. MoMA sought major concessions from unions while raising \$858 million for its last expansion, completed in 2004, resulting in a prolonged strike.

6. According to former Labor Secretary Robert Reich, the charitable deduction amounted to a total of \$40 billion in lost tax revenues in 2007—which, he pointed out at the time, was equal to the total federal allocation to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. (See Robert B. Reich, “Is Harvard Really a Charity?” *Los Angeles Times*, October 1, 2007.) Cultural philanthropy is reported to have averaged about five to six percent of total charitable donations in recent years. This does not, however, include foundation support and corporate philanthropy.

Of course, if the nonprofit art sector exploded in the past decades while the public sector has been under constant budgetary pressure to contract, it is not the result of a direct transfer. However, these phenomena are structurally and historically linked. Historically, the nonprofit sector in the United States developed not, primarily, as an alternative to the private sector, but as an alternative to the public sector. The U.S. model of privately governed cultural institutions has its origins in the gilded age of the late nineteenth century, when Andrew Carnegie and others spread the “gospel of wealth,” advocating for private philanthropy instead of public provision and arguing that wealth is most productively administered by the wealthy and that private initiatives are better suited than the public sector to provide for social needs. The charitable deduction was introduced with a wartime tax increase in 1917 but extended by Treasury Secretary (and National Gallery of Art founder) Andrew Mellon in the 1920s. Mellon slashed top tax rates from 73 percent to 24 percent, arguing that lower taxes would increase tax revenues, spur economic growth—and also encourage philanthropy. The frenzy of financial speculation resulting from Mellon’s economic policies came to an abrupt end with the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression. Mellon’s economic theories returned as the supply-side economics that have driven U.S. economic policy since the 1980s and have led to our most recent gilded age, museum boom—and recession.

7. According to Charity Navigator, donations to cultural charities increased 5.6 percent in 2010, while donations to health charities went up only 1.3 percent and donations to human service charities did not increase at all. See, <http://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=content.view&cpid=42>.

8. I examined the critical and art-historical reception of Michael Asher’s work as an example of this tendency in my essay, “Procedural Matters: The Art of Michael Asher,” *Artforum* 46, no. 10 (Summer 2008), 374–81.

9. Certainly, my own work has not escaped this condition.

10. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford, CA: University of Stanford Press, 1996), 3.

11. See Pierre Bourdieu, “The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed,” p. 50, and “The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods,” pp. 74–76, both in Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). This analysis is often misunderstood as an assertion that art is autonomous or that this inversion of economic criteria defines art. Rather, Bourdieu argues that art’s autonomy in this sense is only ever *relative* to its capacity to invert and exclude external criteria, and that this capacity only developed and can be sustained under specific social and historical conditions.

12. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 54.

13. Sigmund Freud, “Negation” [1925], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIX (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 235–36.

14. Ibid., 237.

15. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 240.

16. Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, 3–4.

17. Freud, “Negation,” 239.

18. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* [1900], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. IV, 318.

19. Freud, “Negation,” 235.