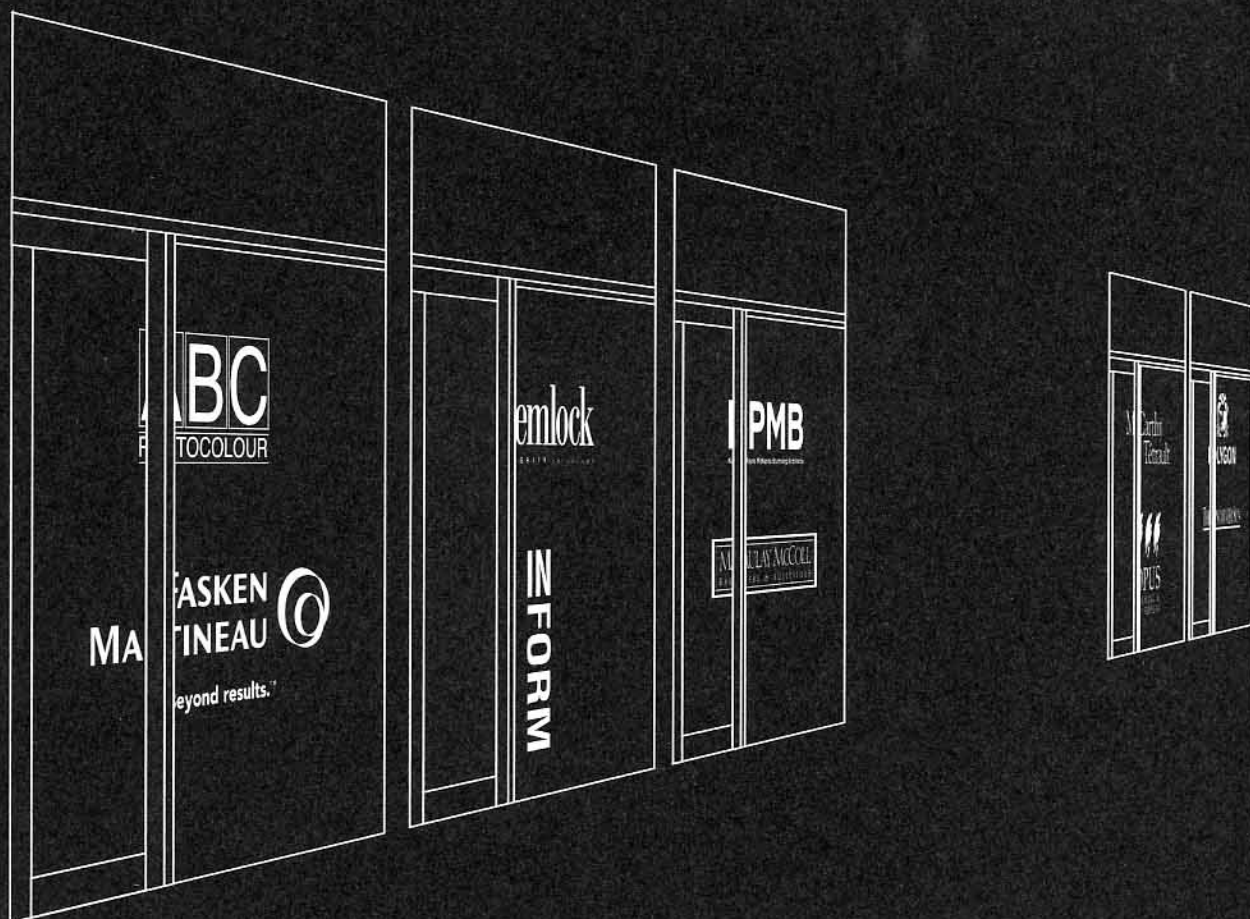


Room To Maneuvre
Kelly Wood



I am writing this essay without the benefit of foresight of Ron Terada's latest exhibition. I have been given, from the artist, the same conceptual framework of information as anyone involved with the realization of the project. Like them, I am to speculate, and I have been afforded this space in which to do so – and so I will. This space – the space of writing – is like any other of the spaces Terada has offered up as room to maneuver as it serves me. This, in turn, and by design, serves Terada.

I have to admire the loop of economic exchange that renders everyone a winner in this, the system of art. As I understand the project, the work begins with an arrangement – a pact. Donors/sponsors buy gallery space and catalogue pages, and are necessary participants in the new work by the artist Ron Terada. The new work, by the artist Ron Terada (you are holding it), is in fact, the conception of this pact and no more. The pact itself adds nothing to the materialization of a traditional art form, but instead offers improvement upon the design of related and promotional media. The pact bears no other function than to substantiate the project with participation. Once established however, it structures the limit condition of all production. The artist has agreed to give over space conventionally devoted to his practice (the art) to the agreed upon participants of the pact. Therefore, we find in the gallery space a proliferation of corporate logos, and donor's names. Control of the gallery is loosely maintained by the artist at the level of the presentation of the logos, etc. Control of the catalogue by the artist is near total and is in strict observance of the standard catalogue format – it is however, claimed by the artist to be the point of the exhibition.

Now, it follows that although we are trained to expect anything from art, the enterprise of "inside outing" the gallery system would seem an aestheticised parody of the curator's, and/or director's role; as if there had been some institutional and bureaucratic eclipse by art and artist. This spilling of the gallery's guts as "the work" – declaring that art could survive its own disappearance by negatively recognizing the cause of it – casts the bureaucrats as assassins and affirms the gallery space as more important than the art it is supposed to serve. But wait, this was the artist's idea! This cannot be what it anticipates. Looking carefully at the details of the design concept I recognize that the relationship of the patron's investiture via the institution is the generative theme of the artist's latest production – although it doesn't end there. This being the case, in the months that have transpired since the project's inception, it isn't surprising that confusion flourished around the Contemporary Art Gallery administration nexus as the artist's role and the professional role of the gallery staff devolved from vague to dim. Terada has changed the battle rules of institutional critique by not having any allusions to outsider status. By locating the source of power in the bureaucracy, and, in a performative sense, occupying this position, as the artist or, "the work," the subterfuge renders the institution incapable of classic function because it has been effectively pre-empted by the "art." Interesting.

Hans Haacke made the issue of sponsorship the subject of his art when he attempted to expose the intricate motivations behind the (seemingly benevolent and disinterested) funding of art by the multinational corporations from *within* the gallery system. I suppose he had hoped that, as Freud claimed,

when the symptom is revealed its time/power is over. It almost worked! But, of course it didn't. The Haacke installations were revelatory, but they could not effect the necessary economy of the institution. Consequently, museums and galleries have strange, crypt-like qualities when displaying these types of works of art but have all the aura of an artificial menace. With the Terada installation it is the same. I cannot decide whether or not this is a new sedition or a fresh pulpit; as there will be something of the church interior in the gallery space and presentation, something familiar in the sight of donor's names all over the walls. Public and private interests will mingle in an opaque horror. Just a minute though, isn't the distinction between public and private a necessary condition of philanthropy? Therefore, if we are witness to transparency here we are privy to a disruption of the historical concepts of public and private – a "distinction internal to bourgeois law, and valid in the (subordinate) domains in which bourgeois law exercises its 'authority.'"¹

Terada's project is obviously aligned with other abstruse actions and avant-garde strategies substantiated in the name of art. Generally speaking, radical manifestations in art such as these and others, variously described as "relational aesthetics," now seek to *incorporate* an artistic means with which to supplement, or even accelerate, social change and can be evaluated by the extent to which they successfully engage the external conditions they address. Since the vulgar and mercantile are part of every topography of human interest structured by the social order under capitalism, no one, let alone an artist, dares even feign to be outside this total order. And why should we? Vested interests and more overt

tactics like product placement are so integrally a part of cultural production and the leisure environment in our time as to become, at best laughable, and at worst, banal. Many artists today take to this subject with a similar abandon.²

The "total sell-out" strategy employed by Terada no doubt raises suspicions as to the true nature of the artist's work as the catalogue itself offers no purchase on the exhibition to which it owes its formation; but we have been down this road before. In response to new and dematerialised art forms emerging in the late 1960s the apparatus of the art world innovated in kind. The conceptual art precedents that were tested (shall we say succeeded?) in the U.S. by the art dealer/publisher/collaborator Seth Siegelaub were, out of necessity and in sympathy with the new art, simply a survival strategy, as he states:

*The public may be the receiver of art from the artist, but this type of activity also opens up the potential for others to be able to make art too, or opens up the entire art making process, by the de-sanctifying, or the breakdown of the hierarchy artist-public. But it also activates the owner or the possessor of a work, by making him or her a participant in certain aspects of the art process (here I am particularly thinking of the work of Douglas Huebler or Lawrence Weiner), which forces or engages the collector to become involved with it, not just a passive owner. It is an entirely different relationship between the artist and the audience.*³

Clearly, these artworks, exhibitions and more specifically publications inform the Terada project.⁴ Siegelaub makes the important distinction that the

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McCarthy
Tétrault



POLYGON



OPUS
FRAMING &
ART SUPPLIES

THE VANCOUVER SUN

North wall of Contemporary
Art Gallery, Vancouver
Adhesive vinyl on wall
Wall dimensions 108 x 312 inches

new work in catalogues and other publications be understood not as secondary to the art (secondary information) but as a primary form (primary information). The stress on communication evolved into an inhabitation of the already existing information systems – McLuhan's "third sector" (the information society). In repudiation of the predominant exhibition format the new art required the viewer to see art in places, and ways, not normally encountered and thus was politically motivated in anti-institutionalism and a kind of class-based critique by means of *art into life*. Joseph Kosuth was prescient when he stated:

I began to realize, as well, that the intelligent and sensitive people in my environment had experiences with nonart portions of their visual world that were of such a quality and consistency that the demarcation of similar experiences as art would make no appreciable difference; that perhaps mankind was beginning to outgrow the need for art on that level; that he was beginning to deal with his world aesthetically.⁵

Vestiges of real world experiences, the processes of making, and all information and media contained within conceptual art works of the period gradually denied the viewer their hypothetical ownership of the art as a *thing*. What is similar about this approach and Terada's project is that both strategies still have all the air of *inclusion* (even though it may play out otherwise); real things, real people, real relations in the real world. What is different about Terada's exhibition is that he has limited most of these relations to predominantly those that constitute the "art world" as such.

It is not enough to dredge the depth of this history. I see the referencing to conceptual art as an

inner determinant of Terada's more encompassing, and, of-the-moment gambit. The Terada catalogue and exhibition specifically address the necessity of marketing relative to any venture, be it fine art, or other. As the proliferation of marketing tactics attests, it is now much more difficult to *sell* something than it is to *make* something. All artists are acutely aware of this relation. This puts a strain on our discussion because, if that's true, by taking the emphasis off the product (i.e. not making anything), so to speak, Terada still might be doing it the hard way! In our global era it is commonly understood that a work of art cannot participate in international market exchange unless it is disseminated and validated via its catalogue – its mobile and liquid form in advance of the product. The quality of the catalogue is paramount; both to the understanding of the artist's *oeuvre* and to the status accorded the artist at the time of the catalogue production. Therefore, if we examine the particular maneuver of the artist to seize the means of production (the gallery system, the catalogue) and to manipulate them in the service of his own ambition we can detect in this strategy the hint of a revolutionary impulse. The artist is clearly not content with the status quo which attends his practice, nor is he content with the orthodoxy of the gallery super-structure which administers his practice. By reconfiguring the *total* system (which includes the self-promotion of the artist's own practice as "exchange value") Terada makes purpose of his impatience with the grinding and stultified institutional process of legitimization.

A revolution – yes, and nobody seems to mind as it merely inflates the entrepreneurial spirit of capitalism inherent in the gallery's private/public function. It

speaks to a crisis of liberalism and this is much to the point as free enterprise makes strange perversions in profit. Terada's acceptance and utilization of the logic of the culture industry under capitalism means the question of the relative autonomy of art is at play again. Open declaration of the mechanisms of the market economy (or capitalist economy) alluded to in Terada's gesture foregrounds its imminence to *commerce* and implicates the gallery as accessory to *business*. Debatably, the Terada project could be understood as a further capitulation to the true aims of capitalism – that is, to re-create a social formation which reproduces the conditions of production at the same time that it produces. Capitalism needs to create the need for capitalism in order for it to thrive as a system. Louis Althusser's reading of Marx and the "apparatus" of capitalism is particularly relevant to an analysis of this project, and I will quote Althusser at length:

To speak in a Marxist language, if it is true that the representation of the real conditions of existence of the individuals occupying the posts of agents of production, exploitation, repression, ideologization and scientific practice, does in the last analysis arise from the relations of production, and from relations deriving from relations of production, we can say the following: all ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production (and the other relations that derive from them), but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them. What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of

*those individuals to the real relations in which they live.*⁶

The pact and resulting catalogue/exhibition bring all manner of means to the fore transforming them from a set of covert bureaucratic, economic and legal/linguistic transactions to the fully articulated content. Full circle – full disclosure. This relationship contains the cause which explains Althusser's "imaginary distortions" of artistic, and other ideological, representations of the real world. Further, when Terada overwrites the space of art to the underwriters of the art establishment, he emphasizes that there is more than the artist's proposition at work in the making of the cultural sphere. It also, intentionally or not, throws some misapprehension on the collective determination of cultural productions.

Terada brings another important dimension to this project; he has foreseen to re-create the marketing nexus which surrounds, supports and perpetuates art as a system in order to maintain art and artist as *superlative*. More strange than a theoretical direct marketing campaign, evident in Terada's strategy is a profound, egotistical privileging of individual power – similar in risk and stress to that of Duchamp's readymade innovations.⁷ As with the invisible pictorial states of Yves Klein's "pneumatic period" (i.e., *le Vide* exhibition in 1958), in-principle, the transformation of space and material is enacted by the sheer mental effort of the artist and accrues value as such. The work's openness to interpretation is absolute cunning and is epitomized by the ephemerality of the near vortex of associations buoyed by the artist's "management" economy.

Robin Anthony
Carol Appel
Kathleen & Brian Bartels
Arabella Campbell
w/Cedric Bomford
Mark Dudiak
Verena Kaminiarz
Andrew Kent
Scott Marshall

Michael Darling
Anonymous
In memory of
Sylvia Shechter
Anonymous
Joe Friday
Catriona Jeffries
Fabrizio LeDonne
Desmond Lee

Anonymous
Julia & Gilles Ouellette
Jeanne Parkin
Carol & Morton Rapp
Laura Rapp & Jay Smith
Janet Scott
Zenon Trylowsky

South wall of Contemporary
Art Gallery, Vancouver
Adhesive vinyl on wall
Wall dimensions 108 x 200 inches

Baudrillard speaks of the “the vanishing point of art” and his lively and messianic tone is wholly appropriate to the complexity of conditions he articulates for contemporary art. Baudrillard observes:

[A]rt should not look for its salvation in nostalgic refusal, for then it becomes only art for art's sake, a futile and powerless mirror of capitalism and of the fatality of merchandise. Instead, it should reinforce the formal and fetishized abstraction of merchandise, the enchantment of exchange-value, by becoming more merchandise than merchandise itself: namely by moving even further away from use-value, while escaping from exchange-value by radicalizing it.⁸

The condition is teleological and arises from a historical determination adaptations to which are not purposely known in advance. It can perhaps be understood, as defined by philosophy, as a prime example of backwards causation (as in the instance of the autonomy, or emancipation, of art containing the inner problematic of its commodity status from the beginning). We may have anticipated it would come to something like this, but were unable to foresee the many phases of the trajectory. In any case, we must still ride out the consequences of the development and trust that there is still room to manoeuvre ahead. I would say the Terada project succeeds in Baudrillard's terms and others I have outlined above. For my part, like others, I came into this project with my tail down in delirium and came out of it with a whip in the back of my mind... and more.

1 Louis Althusser, "Ideology and the State," *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971): 144.

2 I'm thinking, in particular, of the practice of an artist like Sylvie Fluery, or the collective Superflex. More to the point would be the exhibition of Maurizio Cattelan in the Aperto of the 48th Venice Biennale wherein he sold his allotted space to an advertising agency which used it for a promotional campaign for a perfume.

3 Catherine Moseley, "Interview with Seth Siegelau," *Conception. Conceptual Documents 1968-1972* (Norwich: Norwich Gallery, 2001): 147.

4 Detailed discussion of Siegelau's practice as a dealer and work of the conceptual artists of the period is fully discussed in Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press).

5 Quoted in Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press): 47.

6 Louis Althusser, "Ideology and the State," *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971): 164-65.

7 "It is as if Duchamp... had put his finger on a naked fact, which was not dialectizable no matter how much effort was exerted in trying to resolve the contradiction. On the one hand, the artisan and also the artisan-painter were condemned to economic decline by the industrialization of handcraft and to cultural marginalisation by the pressing needs of an industrial culture. On the other hand, industry could not claim a cultural dimension without some kind of consciousness registering its raw creativity in continuity with tradition." Thierry De Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991): 113-14.

8 Jean Baudrillard "Beyond the Vanishing Point of Art," *Post-Pop Art*, ed. Paul Taylor (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989): 173.