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Platform / Réseau des Fonds régionaux d'art contemporain
32 rue Yves Toudic
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Objet : Projet de recherche sur les collections des Frac

Bagnolet, le 4 octobre 2024

Madame, Monsieur,

En réponse à votre appel, je vous présente les recherches que je souhaite mener sur les collections des Frac. J'enseigne à l'Université Paris Cité à temps partiel jusqu'à la fin de l'année 2024. Je pourrai donc entamer ce projet dès novembre et m'y dédier entièrement tout au long du premier semestre 2025.

Ma thèse de doctorat, récompensée en 2023 par le prix « Valois » du ministère de la Culture et en cours de publication chez CNRS Éditions, portait sur les profondes transformations des politiques et des institutions publiques de l'art contemporain dans les années 1960-1970. L'appel à projet porté par le réseau des Frac est une formidable opportunité de prolonger ces recherches vers la période immédiatement postérieure, en étudiant les évolutions depuis quatre décennies d'un nouveau type de lieux d'exposition et de collection de l'art contemporain en France.

Dans cette perspective, la numérisation des collections des Frac représente une ressource d'une très grande richesse, puisqu'elle offre un panorama exhaustif des choix effectués par vingt-trois institutions publiques dans la production artistique contemporaine, française et internationale, depuis 1982. Le rapport établi en 2021 par l'Inspection générale de la création artistique, joint à votre appel, s'appuie sur ces outils pour mettre en lumière de très intéressantes évolutions sur la féminisation (inachevée) des collections publiques d'art contemporain, le rôle de celles-ci dans la construction des carrières artistiques ou encore leurs correspondances avec les échelles de réputation internationale – en prenant d'ailleurs à contrepied certains lieux communs sur les Frac.

Je souhaite, en un sens, compléter ce travail en m'intéressant aux individus derrière ces collections, à savoir les responsables à la tête des Frac. Ceux-ci ne sont certes pas les seuls décideurs, puisqu'ils sont assistés par des comités techniques d'acquisition, composés d'artistes, de critiques d'art, de conservateurs de musées, etc. Mais ils impulsent des orientations générales, ayant d'ailleurs conduit à la spécialisation des collections de certains Frac.

Complétant une histoire de l'art centrée sur les artistes et leurs œuvres, plusieurs travaux ont mis en lumière ces dernières années le rôle joué par les différentes catégories d'intermédiaires de l'art contemporain, comme les curateurs ou les galeristes. C'est un champ de recherche qui reste cependant à explorer : tandis que les historiens de l'art se focalisent généralement sur des périodes plus anciennes, les transformations récentes des circuits de production et de diffusion de l'art contemporain sont surtout étudiées par les sciences sociales. Si celles-ci inspirent plusieurs des enjeux et des méthodes de mes recherches, elles se limitent souvent à une sociologie des professions culturelles et tendent de ce fait à se désintéresser des engagements proprement artistiques de ces intermédiaires.

Mon objectif sera donc de croiser l'étude des responsables des Frac avec l'analyse de leurs choix artistiques, à partir des bases de données sur leurs collections. Il ne s'agit pas, bien sûr, de personnaliser ces choix – les résultats finaux de l'enquête pourront d'ailleurs être anonymisées selon les conventions en vigueur dans les SHS – mais d'identifier certains déterminants qui façonnent les orientations artistiques d'une collection publique et leurs évolutions. Je souhaite, pour ce faire, mener une enquête prosopographique sur l'ensemble des directeurs et directrices des Frac depuis leur création. Ceux-ci

représentent un échantillon particulièrement intéressant de ces nouvelles figures d'intermédiaires publics de l'art contemporain qui se sont multipliées depuis les années 1980, dans le sillage du développement et de la professionnalisation des politiques de soutien à la création artistique en France. Leur nombre est suffisamment circonscrit pour assurer la faisabilité de l'enquête en un peu plus de six mois de travail et assez large néanmoins pour dégager des tendances significatives et mesurer des changements structurels au sein de cette population. Je leur adresserai un bref questionnaire afin de récolter quelques informations-clefs sur leur formation et leur trajectoire professionnelle notamment. Je le complèterai par des entretiens avec cinq à dix de ces responsables, choisis de manière aussi variée et représentative que possible : ces échanges soutiendront une approche plus qualitative des motivations et des dispositions qui orientent les choix artistiques de ces figures prescriptrices du monde de l'art.

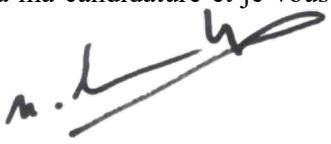
Mes précédentes recherches m'ont déjà conduit à m'intéresser au rôle des intermédiaires de l'art contemporain. En construisant notamment une vaste base de données sur les expositions de 25 Kunsthalle et musées allemands entre 1945 et 1980, j'ai mis en évidence que leur tournant vers un art plus récent et expérimental à partir du milieu des années 1960 correspondait à un moment de fort renouvellement et de rajeunissement des conservateurs de musées et curateurs à la tête de ces institutions. Ce sont des corrélations de ce type que je souhaite explorer, en étudiant, par exemple, comment les acquisitions des Frac peuvent être orientées par la féminisation de leurs responsables, les générations auxquels ceux-ci appartiennent ou les évolutions de leur formation. Mon projet lie en ce sens l'histoire de l'art contemporain et de ses institutions avec des outils et concepts tirés de la sociologie des intermédiaires culturels et d'une socio-histoire du goût.

Ce nouveau projet prolonge en cela l'ouverture pluridisciplinaire qui caractérisait déjà ma thèse, à la croisée entre histoire de l'art, histoire culturelle, muséologie et sociologie de l'art. Elle s'appuyait sur de nombreux entretiens et sources documentaires obtenues en France, en Allemagne et aux États-Unis, où j'ai pu effectuer plusieurs séjours de recherche grâce à une bourse de la Terra Foundation for American Art. Elle associait également études de cas et méthodes quantitatives – un type d'outil auquel j'ai continué de me former en suivant en 2023 l'école d'été du CNRS « Quantilille ». Je dispose donc des compétences à la fois théoriques et techniques pour mener à bien un tel projet dans le temps imparti.

Par ailleurs, j'ai eu l'occasion, il y a plusieurs années, de travailler dans divers lieux d'exposition (musée, centre d'art, galerie) et je continue d'entretenir des liens avec plusieurs institutions artistiques, comme chercheur désormais : j'ai ainsi contribué récemment à la programmation scientifique du Palais de Tokyo, du Centre Pompidou, du Musée de l'Orangerie ou du CAPC. J'ai donc une certaine familiarité avec le fonctionnement de ces institutions qui facilitera l'avancée de mon travail, notamment dans les prises de contact et entretiens avec leurs responsables.

J'espère aussi tirer profit de cette double expérience, entre monde universitaire et monde de l'art, pour assurer la meilleure diffusion possible des résultats de ce projet. Le texte rédigé pour le site de Platform et des Frac pourra être doublé, avec votre accord, par un ou plusieurs articles publiés dans revues à comité de lecture et des communications scientifiques. J'aimerais d'ailleurs que la conclusion de ce travail d'enquête puisse s'accompagner, avec votre soutien, d'une journée d'étude dédiée aux responsables des collections publiques d'art contemporain en France (ou à l'échelle européenne). Je pourrai m'appuyer, pour ce faire, sur plusieurs réseaux de recherche, en tant qu'éditeur de la revue *Marges* (Presses universitaires de Vincennes) et membre d'associations scientifiques comme le Comité français des historiens de l'art ou The International Art Market Studies Association. Bien sûr, je serais ravi d'échanger avec vous pour imaginer d'autres manières de valoriser ce projet et de contribuer à toute initiative du réseau des Frac à ce sujet.

Je vous remercie pour l'attention que vous porterez à ma candidature et je vous prie d'agréer, Madame, Monsieur, mes salutations distinguées.



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PARCOURS ET COMPÉTENCES

FONCTIONS UNIVERSITAIRES

Jan.-déc. 2024	**Enseignant vacataire**, Université Paris-Cité, Master Sciences sociales, parcours « Politiques culturelles »
Sept. 2022-août 2023	**Attaché temporaire d'enseignement et de recherche**, Université de Lille, pôle Arts plastiques
Jan.-juil. 2022	**Attaché temporaire d'enseignement et de recherche**, Université Rennes 2, département Arts plastiques
Sept. 2015-juil. 2021	**Enseignant vacataire**, Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis, département Arts plastiques

FORMATION ET TITRES UNIVERSITAIRES

2023 **École d'été de Lille en méthodes quantitatives en sciences sociales (Quantilille)**, école thématique du CNRS, Institut d'Études Politiques de Lille.

2022 **Doctorat en Esthétique, sciences et technologie des arts**, Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis, laboratoire Arts des images et art contemporain.

Thèse : *L'État contre la norme. Le tournant des institutions publiques vers l'art d'avant-garde, 1959-1977 (Allemagne de l'Ouest, États-Unis, France)*.

Direction : Jérôme Glicenstein.

Jury de soutenance : Catherine Dossin, Laurent Jeanpierre, Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, Antje Kramer-Mallordy, Laurent Martin

Prix de thèse « Valois » décerné par le ministère de la Culture (2023)

2014 **Master recherche en Philosophie**, mention « Esthétique et philosophie de l'art », Université Paris-Sorbonne. Mention « Très bien ».

2013 **Master professionnel en Histoire de l'art**, « L'art contemporain et son exposition », Université Paris-Sorbonne. Mention « Bien ».

2012 **Master recherche en Lettres**, mention « Arts, Esthétique, Littératures comparées », Université Paris Diderot-Paris 7. Mention « Très bien ».

2012 **Premier cycle d'Histoire de l'art**, option art contemporain, École du Louvre (Paris).

AUTRES ACTIVITÉS PROFESSIONNELLES

Sept.-nov. 2023	Conseiller scientifique pour un projet de médiation culturelle au **Palais de Tokyo**, Paris
Avril-sept. 2017	Rapporteur pour les Aides individuelles à la création, **Direction régionale des affaires culturelles d'Île-de-France**, Paris
Nov. 2012-juil. 2013	Assistant curateur, **Palais de Tokyo**, Paris : coordination de la saison « Nouvelles Vagues » (été 2013), composé de 21 expositions au Palais de Tokyo associées à une trentaine d'expositions dans des galeries parisiennes partenaires
2012-2013	Co-fondation du collectif curatorial **ABOUT:BLANK** (expositions à l'École des Beaux-arts de Monaco, aux Beaux-Arts de Paris, au Cneai)
Jan.-mai 2012	Assistant du président de la **Maison Européenne de la Photographie**
2009-2011	Critique d'art, **Paris-art.com**. Revues régulières des expositions des galeries Nathalie Obadia, Chantal Crousel, Air de Paris
Mai-août 2010	Secrétaire de rédaction, revue ***MAY***
Mars-mai 2010	Assistant de galerie, **Galerie Aline Vidal**, Paris
Juil.-août 2007	Assistant pour l'inventaire des collections, **Musée Denys Puech**, Rodez

ACTIVITÉS DE RECHERCHE

RESPONSABILITÉS COLLECTIVES

Laboratoires de recherche

Depuis 2014	Membre du laboratoire Arts des images et art contemporain (AIAC) de l'Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis
2022-2023	Membre associé du Centre d'étude des arts contemporains (CEAC) de l'Université de Lille

Réseaux de recherche

Depuis 2024	Membre du Comité français des historiens de l'art (CFHA)
Depuis 2024	Membre de The International Art Market Studies Association (TIAMSA)

Responsabilités scientifiques

Sept. 2024-avril 2025	Comité scientifique du colloque international « La critique d'art et le musée : dynamiques et enjeux d'une relation au XX^{e} siècle » (Université Rennes 2 / Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art)
Depuis 2015	Comité éditorial de la revue *Marges* (Presses universitaires de Vincennes)
Février 2023	*Reviewer* pour la revue *Visual Resources* (Routledge)

PUBLICATIONS

Ouvrage

L'État contre la norme. Le tournant des institutions publiques vers l'art d'avant-garde, 1959-1977 (Allemagne de l'Ouest, États-Unis, France), à paraître en 2025 chez CNRS Éditions, collection « Culture et Société » (dir. Gisèle Sapiro).

Direction d'ouvrages

Marges, n°38, « Sociologie de l'art contemporain », avril 2024. Disponible en ligne.

Marges, n°32, « La circulation des idées dans les mondes de l'art », avril 2021. Disponible en ligne.

Marges, n°26, « Instrumentalisations de l'art », avril 2018 (avec Gwenn Riou). Disponible en ligne.

Marges, n°25, « Archives », octobre 2017 (avec Gabriel Ferreira Zacarias). Disponible en ligne.

Articles dans des revues à comité de lecture

« Peter Bürger et le renouvellement des études littéraires dans la RFA des "années 68" », *Regards croisés. Revue franco-allemande d'histoire de l'art, d'esthétique et de littérature comparée*, n°15, à paraître.

« De l'avant-garde à l'art contemporain : extension ou dissolution de l'autonomie de l'art ? », *Perspective. Actualité en histoire de l'art*, n°2024-1, « Autonomie », mai 2024, p. 221-240. Disponible en ligne.

« Introduction. Sociologie et histoire de l'art : apports mutuels et obstacles à l'interdisciplinarité », *Marges*, n°38, avril 2024, p. 10-20. Disponible en ligne.

« Avant-garde or Democracy? Transformations and Dilemmas of the U.S. Public Art Program in the 1970s », *Cultural Trends* [En ligne], novembre 2023.

« A State Avant-Gardism: Alternative Spaces and Cultural Policies in the United States », *Visual Resources. An International Journal on Images and Their Uses*, vol. 27, n°3, avril 2023, p. 174-199. Disponible en ligne.

« Avant-garde et postmodernisme. La réception de la *Théorie de l'avant-garde* de Peter Bürger dans la critique d'art américaine », *Biens symboliques / Symbolic Goods. Revue de sciences sociales sur les arts, la culture et les idées* [En ligne], n°11, décembre 2022.

« Introduction : la circulation des idées dans l'art contemporain », *Marges*, n°32, avril 2021, p. 10-20. Disponible en ligne.

« Le grand récit de la critique institutionnelle », *Marges*, n°22, avril 2016, p. 50-63. Disponible en ligne.

Articles dans des ouvrages collectifs

« Can a museum be exorcised? The Palais de Tokyo's *Part maudite* », co-écrit avec Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, dans *Musei e Contesti* (dir. Vanda Lisanti, Caterina Paparello, Marta Vitullo), Rome, Ginevra Bentivoglio Editoria, à paraître.

« L'art contemporain, une révolution institutionnelle », dans *Le monde de l'art à l'âge du capitalisme culturel* (dir. Aline Caillet, Florian Gaité), Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne / Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, à paraître.

Entretiens

« L'art à la croisée des disciplines. Entretien avec Anne Lafont et Séverine Sofio », *Marges*, n°38, avril 2024, p. 126-143. Disponible en ligne.

« Entretien avec Laurent Jeanpierre », *Marges*, n°32, avril 2021, p. 122-136. Disponible en ligne.

« Entretien avec Hal Foster » (en collaboration avec Gabriel Ferreira Zacarias), *Marges*, n°25, octobre 2017, p. 140-145. Disponible en ligne.

Articles en cours d'évaluation

« Ni culture savante, ni culture populaire : le Centre Pompidou, instrument et emblème d'une troisième voie pour les politiques culturelles dans l'après-68 », *Politix*.

« Réformer le MNAM avant Beaubourg. Du Musée du XX^e^ siècle au Centre national d'art contemporain », *Les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*.

Recensions d'ouvrages et d'expositions

« "Hans Dickel, *Konzeptionen zeitgenössischer Kunst: Zum Wandel des Kunstbegriffs seit 1900* », *Regards croisés*, à paraître.

« Elitza Dulguerova (dir.), *La Biennale internationale des jeunes artistes. Paris (1959-1985)* », *Histoire de l'art*, à paraître.

« Larissa Buchholz, *The Global Rules of Art. The Emergence and Divisions of a Cultural World Economy* », *Sociologie de l'art*, à paraître.

« Marjorie Glas, *Quand l'art chasse le populaire. Socio-histoire du théâtre public en France depuis 1945* », *Marges* [En ligne], n°38, avril 2024, p. 158-159.

« Pierre Bourdieu, *Impérialismes. Circulation internationale des idées et luttes pour l'universel* », *Marges* [En ligne], n°37, octobre 2023, p. 150-151.

« Paula Barreiro López, *Compagnons de lutte. Avant-garde et critique d'art en Espagne pendant le franquisme* », *Critique d'art* [En ligne], n°60, juin 2023.

« Alain Quemin, *Le Monde des galeries. Art contemporain, structure du marché et internationalisation* », *La Vie des Idées* [En ligne], 25 mai 2023.

« Marie Gispert, *Jean Cassou. Une histoire du musée* », *Revue d'histoire culturelle* [En ligne], n°6, avril 2023.

« Peter Burke, *Qu'est-ce que l'histoire culturelle ?* » [En ligne], *Marges*, n°36, avril 2023, p. 180-181.

« Claude Gautier, Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, *De la défense des savoirs critiques* » [En ligne], *Marges*, n°36, avril 2023, p. 192-195.

« Philippe Coulangeon, *Culture de masse et société de classes. Le goût de l'altérité* » [En ligne], *Marges*, n°34, avril 2022, p. 196-199.

« Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Naissance de l'art contemporain* » [En ligne], *Marges*, n°34, avril 2022, p. 194-195.

« Benjamin Fellmann, *Palais de Tokyo. Kunstpolitik und Asthetik im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert* » [En ligne], *Marges*, n°32, avril 2021, p. 158-159.

« Gisèle Sapiro, *Peut-on dissocier l'œuvre de l'auteur ?* », *Marges* [En ligne], n°32, avril 2021, p. 168-169.

« Fred Turner, *L'usage de l'art. De Burning Man à Facebook, art, technologie et management dans la Silicon Valley* », *Lectures* [En ligne], 10 février 2021.

« Jacques Rancière, *Les temps modernes. Art, temps, politique* » [En ligne], *Marges*, n°29, avril 2020, p. 164-165.

« Olivier Quintyn, *Implémentations /implantations : pragmatisme et théorie critique. Essais sur l'art et la philosophie de l'art* », *Marges* [En ligne], n°28, avril 2019, p. 146-147.

« Boris Gobille, *Le Mai 68 des écrivains. Crise politique et avant-gardes littéraires* » [En ligne], *Marges*, n°27, octobre 2018, p. 206-207.

« Laurent Cauwet, *La domestication de l'art. Politique et mécénat* » [En ligne], *Marges*, n°27, octobre 2018, p. 204-205.

« Emanuele Quinz, *Le cercle invisible. Environnements, systèmes, dispositifs* » [En ligne], *Marges*, n°27, octobre 2018, p. 200-201.

« Luc Boltanski, Arnaud Esquerre, *Enrichissement. Une critique de la marchandise* » [En ligne], *Marges*, n°26, avril 2018, p. 152-154.

« Pauline Chevalier, *Une histoire des espaces alternatifs à New York – De Soho au South Bronx (1969-1985)* » [En ligne], *Marges*, n°26, avril 2018, p. 139-141.

« Jean-Pierre Cometti. *La Nouvelle aura. Économies de l'art et de la culture* » [En ligne], *Marges*, n°26, avril 2018, p. 134-136.

« 'Soulèvements', Jeu de Paume », *Marges* [En ligne], n°24, avril 2017, p. 146-147.

« Douglas Crimp, *Pictures. S'approprier la photographie. New York, 1979-2014* » [En ligne], *Marges*, n°24, avril 2017, p. 140-141.

« Olivier Quintyn, *Valences de l'avant-garde. Essai sur l'avant-garde, l'art contemporain et l'institution* », *Marges* [En ligne], n°23, octobre 2016, p. 136-137.

« Jack Burnham, Hans Haacke, *Esthétique des systèmes* » [En ligne], *Marges*, n°23, octobre 2016, p. 146-147.

COMMUNICATIONS ET ORGANISATION DE MANIFESTATIONS SCIENTIFIQUES

Communications à des colloques et journées d'étude

« À l'interface entre artistes, pouvoirs et publics : dilemmes et contradictions des intermédiaires de l'art contemporain », symposium « Musées : Système, contrôle et émancipation », CAPC (Bordeaux), 12-13 décembre 2024.

« L'art contemporain entre marché et musées. Le cas de l'Allemagne de l'Ouest dans les années 1960-70 », journée d'étude « De la galerie au musée. Histoires de collections de marchands d'art », Centre allemand d'histoire de l'art / Musée de l'Orangerie (Paris), 8 octobre 2024.

« Postmodern Art as Democratic Culture? Public Art and the Federal Government in the United States », colloque international « Art for the Community: Production of Artworks Commissioned for Public Institutions, 1945–1989 », France Stele Institute of Art History, Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Ljubljana), 26 septembre 2024.

« Une approche socio-historique de la genèse de l'art contemporain », journée d'étude « Peinture et illustration », Haute École des Arts du Rhin (Strasbourg), 16 novembre 2023.

« L'art contemporain : une révolution institutionnelle », colloque international « Épistémologies du contemporain. Penser l'autonomie de l'art à l'âge du capitalisme culturel », Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 1er juin 2023.

« Avant-garde ou démocratie ? Transformations et dilemmes de la commande artistique aux États-Unis dans les années 1970 », journée d'étude « Construire et détruire les représentations officielles des pouvoirs », Université Paris Est-Créteil, CRHEC, 2 juin 2022.

« Un avant-gardisme d'État : espaces alternatifs et politiques culturelles aux États-Unis dans les années 1970 », colloque « Écrire contre l'État. Pensée et esthétique antiétatiques aux XIXe et XXe siècles », Université de Nanterre, 6 avril 2022.

« Avant-garde et postmodernisme. La réception de la *Théorie de l'avant-garde* de Peter Bürger dans la critique d'art américaine », colloque international « Redéfinir le monde (de l'art) - Engagement, défis et crises de la critique d'art internationale depuis 1945 », Archives de la critique d'art / Université Rennes 2, 11-12 octobre 2018.

« "De la critique des institutions à l'institution de la critique" : critique institutionnelle et "New Institutionalism" », journée d'étude « Les arts contemporains et leur espace institutionnel », 9 avril 2016, Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (Paris).

Communications à des séminaires de recherche

« Ni culture légitime, ni culture populaire : le Centre Pompidou, instrument et emblème d'une troisième voie pour les politiques culturelles dans l'après-68 », séminaire « Les cinquante premières années du Centre Georges-Pompidou : bilans et perspectives », Comité d'histoire du ministère de la Culture, 6 juin 2023.

« Entre comparatisme et histoire croisée. Avant-gardes et institutions publiques en Allemagne de l'Ouest, en France et aux États-Unis (1959-1977) », séminaire « L'atelier du transnational : les défis méthodologiques de l'histoire transnationale », département d'histoire contemporaine de l'Institut historique allemand (Paris), 8 février 2023.

« Révolutionner l'art pour ne pas avoir à le démocratiser : les institutions de l'art contemporain face à la contradiction entre libéralisme culturel et démocratisation de l'art », séminaire « Le monde de l'art à l'épreuve de ses marges : diversité, inclusion et droits culturels », Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne / Institut Arts Création Théories Esthétiques, 26 janvier 2023.

« Le tournant des institutions publiques vers l'art d'avant-garde, Allemagne de l'Ouest, États-Unis, France, 1959-1977. Présentation des résultats d'une recherche », séminaire « Art contemporain et exposition », Université Paris 8 / Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, 17 janvier 2022.

« La création du *National Endowment for the Arts* et son action en faveur de l'art contemporain aux États-Unis de 1965 à 1980 », séminaire de recherche « Vie et mort des institutions », Université Paris 8 / Institut National de l'Histoire de l'Art, 29 octobre 2018.

« Une introduction à la critique institutionnelle », séminaire de recherche « Histoire des expositions », Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (Paris), 20 mai 2015.

Organisation de manifestations scientifiques

Journée d'étude « Sociologie de l'art contemporain » organisée le 25 mars 2023 à l'Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (Paris) par la revue *Marges*.

Rencontre avec Marie Gispert autour de l'ouvrage *Jean Cassou, une histoire du musée*, organisée le 17 février 2023 au Centre d'Etude des Arts Contemporains de l'université de Lille.

Journée d'étude « La circulation des idées dans les mondes de l'art » organisée le 24 février 2020 à l'Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (Paris) par la revue *Marges*.

Journée d'étude « Instrumentalisations de l'art » organisée le 25 février 2017 à l'Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (Paris) par la revue *Marges* (en collaboration avec Gwenn Riou).

Journée d'étude « Archives » organisée le 22 octobre 2016 à l'Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (Paris) par la revue *Marges* (en collaboration avec Gabriel Ferreira Zacarias).

Diffusion de la recherche

« Une histoire guidée du Palais », novembre 2023 : organisation de trois visites guidées du Palais de Tokyo, dont deux avec les équipes de l'institution, sur les traces de l'histoire du lieu, depuis son édification dans les années 1930 jusqu'à la création du centre d'art actuel en 2002. Ces échanges avec les équipes du Palais ont pris place dans le cadre de l'événement « Temps faible – Le grand désenvoûtement, chapitre 23 » organisé par Adélaïde Blanc.

« Ni culture légitime, ni culture populaire : le Centre Pompidou, instrument et emblème d'une troisième voie pour les politiques culturelles dans l'après-68 », *Politiques de la culture. Carnet de recherches du Comité d'histoire du ministère de la Culture sur les politiques, les institutions et les pratiques culturelles* [En ligne], juillet 2023. Synthèse de la communication donnée le 6 juin 2023 dans le cadre du séminaire « Les cinquante premières années du Centre Georges-Pompidou : bilans et perspectives ».

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INTRODUCTION

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De l'avant-garde à l'art contemporain : extension ou dissolution de l'autonomie de l'art ?

Nicolas Heimendinger

Le discours sur la fin des avant-gardes a accompagné comme une ombre portée toute l'histoire de l'art moderne : on déplore ou dénonce à chaque génération leurs échecs, leurs compromissions ou leur banalisation[1]. Les débats autour du postmodernisme, qui se développent aux États-Unis à partir de la fin des années 1960, érigent ces proclamations habituelles au niveau d'une rupture historique : le sentiment de vivre un basculement d'époque, rompant non pas avec tel mouvement particulier, mais avec la modernité artistique tout entière, s'impose alors comme une intuition largement partagée (BERTENS, 1995 ; ANDERSON, [1998] 2010). Pourtant, au-delà de ce constat commun, les différentes analyses des causes de ce changement et la caractérisation de la nouvelle période censée s'ouvrir peuvent différer du tout au tout, voire se contredire ouvertement. Et c'est notamment autour du concept d'autonomie que se cristallisent divergences et désaccords.

En effet, aux États-Unis, le postmodernisme émerge d'abord à partir d'une critique de l'autonomie de l'œuvre d'art moderniste, telle que l'avait conceptualisée Clement Greenberg dès la fin des années 1930. Dans ses thèses bien connues, Greenberg définit l'histoire de l'art moderne comme un long processus de réduction de chaque discipline artistique à son essence spécifique. Les artistes d'avant-garde se détourneraient progressivement des préoccupations de contenu pour faire des moyens plastiques le sujet même de leurs œuvres (GREENBERG, [1939] 1988, p. 13). C'est cette compréhension formaliste de l'autonomie de l'art qui se trouve sous les feux de la critique à partir des années 1960 aux États-Unis et fait office de repoussoir pour l'art et la théorie de l'art postmodernistes (BUCHLOH, GUILBAUT, SOLKIN, [1983] 2004).

Au même moment ou presque, de l'autre côté de l'Atlantique, Peter Bürger propose une lecture à front renversé de l'histoire des avant-gardes comme de leur épuisement contemporain. En effet, dans sa *Théorie de l'avant-garde* ([1974] 2013), l'universitaire allemand définit les avant-gardes par leur critique radicale de l'autonomie de l'art, déjà acquise selon lui dans le dernier tiers du XIX^e^ siècle. Dada, le surréalisme ou le constructivisme russe, qu'il présente comme les parangons de l'idée d'avant-garde, s'opposent à ce qu'il appelle « le stade de l'esthétisme », c'est-à-dire aux doctrines de l'art pour l'art, comprises comme l'expression d'une autonomisation achevée de « l'institution Art ».

Là où Greenberg faisait coïncider les débuts de l'art moderne avec un processus de dépolitisation (GREENBERG, [1939] 1988, p. 12) – réduisant en conséquence son histoire à une lignée courant de l'impressionnisme à l'expressionnisme abstrait, en passant par le fauvisme et le cubisme (GREENBERG, [1968] 1995, p. 296) –, Bürger considère à l'inverse que les avant-gardes émergent en protestation contre l'impuissance sociale à laquelle les condamne l'art pour l'art. Elles viseraient ainsi à dépasser le stade de l'autonomie de l'art, en fusionnant l'art dans la vie.

Bürger doit néanmoins constater l'échec de ce projet, dont atteste l'esthétisation ultérieure des anti-œuvres de l'avant-garde – *ready-mades* dadaïstes ou objets trouvés surréalistes –, désormais exposées comme des œuvres muséales ordinaires. Il tire de cette observation une condamnation sans appel des « néo-avant-gardes », c'est-à-dire des différents mouvements artistiques qui ont repris depuis 1945 certaines pratiques caractéristiques des avant-gardes historiques, mais en les intégrant dans le cadre protégé des institutions artistiques et en les vidant ainsi de leurs ambitions révolutionnaires initiales (BÜRGER, [1974] 2013, p. 95). Là où les premiers postmodernistes états-uniens pensent donc incarner une rupture radicale avec le dogme de l'autonomie de l'art, identifié tout entier à l'idée d'avant-garde, selon Bürger, au contraire, les néo-avant-gardes des années 1960 opèrent un retour à l'autonomie de l'art qu'avaient tenté de dépasser les avant-gardes historiques.

Sans pousser plus avant l'analyse comparée des thèses de Greenberg et Bürger, ce rappel indique tout à la fois la centralité du concept d'autonomie artistique dans les débats postmodernistes et les confusions qui l'entourent, en particulier dans ses rapports avec les notions d'avant-garde et de modernisme. Les contradictions, réelles ou apparentes, entre ces différents auteurs tiennent, on le devine, au caractère polysémique de la notion d'autonomie. Sans prétendre résoudre dans l'espace de cet article une question de définition qui a fait l'objet d'une littérature abondante (BUCH, 2014 ; KARSTEIN, ZAHNER, 2017 ; SAPIRO, 2019), ni surenchérir dans l'exercice des distinctions sémantiques – certains auteurs ont recensé jusqu'à une douzaine de sens possibles de la notion (ZUIDERVAART, 1990, p. 68) –, je souhaite ici procéder à certaines clarifications nécessaires pour analyser la fin des avant-gardes et l'émergence de l'art contemporain. Je m'appuie pour cela sur les résultats d'une enquête récemment achevée sur les transformations des rapports entre avant-gardes et institutions publiques dans les années 1960-1970, prolongés par les hypothèses d'une recherche en cours. La transition de l'art moderne à l'art contemporain, comme j'essaierai de le montrer, n'a pas correspondu à une dissolution de l'autonomie de l'art, mais au contraire à une généralisation, au sein du champ de l'art, des valeurs d'autonomie radicale autrefois prônées par les avant-gardes.

Avant-garde, purisme et autonomie de l'art : trois distinctions

Les débuts du postmodernisme ou le retour de l'avant-garde

Si les analyses postmodernistes de la fin des avant-gardes apparaissent souvent contradictoires, c'est que ces débats, qui se sont étirés de la fin des années 1960 jusqu'aux années 1990, ont recouvert, sous un même nom, des réalités différentes. C'est ce qu'a bien perçu Andreas Huyssen dès 1984, en proposant de distinguer un premier postmodernisme, apparu dans les années 1960, d'un second, qu'il situe dans les années 1970-1980 (HUYSSEN, 1984). Il est clair, à tout le moins, que le postmodernisme a été,

à ses débuts, un phénomène assez spécifiquement états-unien, qu'on peut alors résumer à un rejet du formalisme moderniste, aussi bien de la part des artistes que des théoriciens et des critiques d'art.

En effet, aux États-Unis, l'avant-garde a purement et simplement été identifiée à l'influente définition qu'en avait donnée Greenberg (voir par exemple KRAUSS, [1986] 1993). « "Modernisme" signifiait ce que Clement Greenberg disait que cela signifiait », explique un critique d'art de l'époque, de sorte que proclamer la fin de l'avant-garde revenait surtout à contester « l'hégémonie de la théorie formaliste qui avait revendiqué ou s'était approprié le terme de modernisme » (STEPHANSON, 1990, p. 56). C'est aussi le résultat des conditions particulières de l'implantation outre-Atlantique de l'art moderne qui a pu apparaître, au début du XX^e^ siècle, comme un produit d'importation européen, à une période où les œuvres du Vieux Continent y sont encore reçues comme le mètre-étalon de toute valeur artistique (COHEN-SOLAL, 2000). L'art moderne s'est ainsi trouvé durablement assimilé à un prolongement de cette culture savante européenne dont se prévalent les élites de la côte Est, sans que ne soit toujours bien perçue la relation plus conflictuelle qu'entretiennent les avant-gardes avec les hiérarchies culturelles (et sociales) traditionnelles dans leurs pays d'origine. Ce biais initial est redoublé, à partir de la fin des années 1930 et plus encore lorsque s'installe la guerre froide, par un contexte géopolitique qui favorise la défiance vis-à-vis de toute forme de politisation de l'art : la reconnaissance publique et muséale de l'art moderne au milieu du siècle a ainsi été conditionnée par son esthétisation, au détriment de sa dimension critique ou utopique (GUILBAUT, [1983] 1996 ; NOYES-PLATT, 1988). De sorte que, paradoxalement, en contestant le modernisme greenbergien, les premiers postmodernistes renouent avec tout un pan des avant-gardes historiques longtemps dévalorisées ou ignorées aux États-Unis – à savoir ces avant-gardes critiques de « l'art pour l'art », souvent politisées et « anti-art », qui constituent les seules vraies avant-gardes pour un théoricien comme Bürger (HEIMENDINGER, 2022b). La fameuse table comparative entre *modernism* et *postmodernism* de Ihab Hassan (1981 ; **fig. 1**), l'un des premiers théoriciens du postmodernisme dans le champ littéraire, est symptomatique de cette confusion, puisqu'elle classe du côté postmoderniste des mouvements (pataphysique, dadaïsme, anarchie) et des valeurs (hasard, jeu, ironie, indétermination, dispersion) pourtant éminemment caractéristiques des avant-gardes du début du siècle – mais des avant-gardes au sens de Bürger et non de Greenberg.

C'est ce qui permet à Huyssen d'avancer, avec une pointe d'ironie, que ce premier postmodernisme a marqué « pour la première fois dans la culture états-unienne une révolte avant-gardiste contre une tradition de haute culture » (HUYSSEN, 1984, p. 21). De fait, les diverses remises en cause de l'hégémonie de l'expressionnisme abstrait au tournant des années 1960 – néo-Dada, Pop Art ou minimalisme – ne valent pas abandon de l'idée d'avant-garde en tant que telle, comme le prétendait Greenberg (GREENBERG, [1968] 1995), mais rompent seulement avec les formules devenues routinières de l'abstraction d'après-guerre (JOYEUX-PRUNEL, 2021). En ce sens, elles ravivent au contraire un discours de rupture et des pratiques anti-conventionnelles caractéristiques de certaines avant-gardes du début du siècle, qui font d'ailleurs l'objet, pour cette raison même, d'une réévaluation concomitante (MEYER, 2001, p. 290 ; RIOUT, 2010 ; DELFINER, 2011).

L'avant-garde et l'art pour l'art

La critique du formalisme greenbergien qui fonde ce premier postmodernisme n'implique donc pas nécessairement la fin des avant-gardes. À cet égard, l'un des principaux mérites de la *Théorie de l'avant-garde* est d'avoir contribué à défaire l'association entre l'idée d'avant-garde

1. Ihab Hassan, tableau des différences entre modernisme et postmodernisme, dans HASSAN, 1981, p. 34.

et les doctrines de l'art pour l'art, bien que Bürger tombe dans l'excès inverse en faisant des mouvements « anti-art » comme Dada ou le productivisme russe les seules avant-gardes authentiques. En « attir[ant] notre attention à nouveau sur ces héritages que les formalistes américains comme Greenberg et Fried […] ont rejeté ou renié » (BOIS, BUCHLOH, FOSTER *et al.*, 2004, p. 380), il permet à tout le moins de rappeler que ces conceptions puristes de la modernité artistique ne correspondent pas plus aux néo-avant-gardes des années 1960 (BUCHLOH, 2003 ; JOYEUX-PRUNEL, 2021) qu'aux avant-gardes historiques de l'entre-deux-guerres (BRU, MARTENS, 2006 ; JOYEUX-PRUNEL, 2017).

Même l'émergence et les premiers temps de la modernité artistique ne peuvent être assimilés sans nuance à l'art pour l'art – une thèse que l'on retrouve pourtant jusque chez des théoriciens peu suspects de formalisme. C'est le cas de Bürger lui-même qui, pour mieux défendre sa définition restrictive de l'avant-garde, limitée aux mouvements des années 1910-1930, identifie tout l'art de la fin du XIX^e^ et du début du XX^e^ siècle à « l'esthétisme ». C'est une critique que l'on peut adresser aussi à la sociologie de l'art bourdieusienne, qui associe la naissance de l'avant-garde littéraire et picturale des années 1860-1880 à l'affirmation

de « l'esthétique "pure" » (BOURDIEU, 1992, p. 178-185). Or, une telle association tend à simplifier les processus d'émergence de l'art moderne, en dévalorisant par exemple le rôle du réalisme engagé de Courbet (BOURDIEU, 2013, p. 133-134), au profit de figures artistiques plus « puristes » (Baudelaire, Flaubert, Mallarmé ou Manet).

Autonomie de l'art et esthétiques puristes

Ce biais n'est pas accidentel mais tient, dans le modèle de Bourdieu, à l'assimilation entre le processus d'autonomisation sociale du champ artistique et l'adoption des doctrines de « l'art pour l'art » (BOURDIEU 1992, p. 206). C'est là une deuxième confusion, qu'il partage avec Bürger (BÜRGER, [1974] 2013, p. 59-90) comme avec Greenberg (GREENBERG, [1939] 1988), à partir de prémisses pourtant bien différentes.

Or il apparaît nécessaire de distinguer l'autonomie sociale de l'art des esthétiques « puristes[2] ». D'un point de vue sociologique, l'autonomie de l'art renvoie à un processus historique caractéristique de la modernité, qui n'est d'ailleurs pas propre aux arts : la différenciation d'un domaine d'activité – un champ, un monde, une sphère, un sous-système, selon le lexique privilégié – vis-à-vis d'autres domaines connexes avec lesquels il était autrefois confondu, et l'affirmation corrélative de sa spécificité. Produit de la division sociale du travail, ce processus rend possible l'essor des revendications d'autodétermination de la part des acteurs individuels et collectifs de l'espace social concerné, qui consolident et approfondissent en retour son autonomie. En l'occurrence, les artistes affirment l'existence de règles et de valeurs spécifiques qui seules régissent leurs activités ; ils visent à les faire reconnaître et garantir publiquement pour se défendre de l'assujettissement à d'autres normes, jugées désormais étrangères à leur activité et donc contraignantes, imposées par des puissances sociales rejetées à l'extérieur du champ en voie d'autonomisation (BOURDIEU, 1971, p. 50-52).

Il est tentant de faire de l'art pour l'art le résultat nécessaire de ce processus d'autonomisation. Certes, les esthétiques puristes ont bien partie liée avec l'autonomisation du champ artistique : leur émergence, d'abord, est conditionnée par l'acquisition d'une autonomie sociale déjà avancée[3] et, réciproquement, leur affirmation depuis le XIX^e^ siècle a participé à renforcer et radicaliser cette autonomisation, à travers l'expression du principe d'une spécificité des buts et des valeurs artistiques. Cependant, le purisme n'est qu'une expression possible, historiquement située, de ce mouvement vers l'autonomie de l'art et ne le résume pas : un artiste peut revendiquer sa liberté créative et néanmoins produire des œuvres édifiantes, revendicatives ou utilitaires, pourvu que celles-ci ne résultent pas de l'imposition d'une demande extérieure. Plus encore, les avant-gardes politisées ont également concouru à l'autonomisation sociale du monde de l'art. En effet, sous certaines conditions, les engagements, les contestations et les transgressions artistiques manifestent le conflit entre la souveraineté de l'artiste et les contraintes ou les demandes qui pèsent sur lui – et contribuent ainsi à imposer et légitimer la différenciation mutuelle entre le champ de l'art et le monde social qui l'entoure (ZIMBLER, 2009 ; SAPIRO, 2019).

Réciproquement, le choix de l'art pour l'art peut prendre une valeur politique, soit qu'il acquière une charge critique dans des régimes qui exigent de l'artiste la soumission à une esthétique propagandiste (SAPIRO, 2003, p. 449), soit qu'il devienne, à l'inverse, le véhicule d'une dépolitisation conservatrice – qui n'est pas moins idéologique que des formes explicites de militantisme artistique. C'est paradoxalement en raison de son relatif apolitisme que la peinture abstraite a pu servir des entreprises de propagande en temps de guerre froide, en tant que symbole du libéralisme artistique – et donc politique – de l'Occident face à l'URSS (GUILBAUT, [1983] 1996 ; ECKMANN, 2009 ; WERMESTER, 2018 ; BARREIRO LÓPEZ, 2023).

En outre, comme l'ont mis en lumière un certain nombre d'études depuis le travail fondateur de Serge Guilbaut (DOSS, 1995 ; CRAVEN, 1999 ; JACHEC, 2000), ces avant-gardes abstraites des années 1940-1950 entretenaient un rapport plus ambivalent aux approches formalistes qu'on ne le décrit habituellement. Celles-ci leur ont été appliquées de manière discutable par une partie de la critique d'art, contribuant à masquer rétrospectivement les antagonismes sociaux, politiques, existentiels qui ont marqué la production de ces œuvres comme leur réception initiale. Autrement dit, non seulement la distinction entre avant-gardes puristes et non-puristes ne recoupe pas une hypothétique division entre art autonome et art hétéronome, mais elle ne correspond même pas à deux catégories d'avant-gardes bien définies et clairement distinctes. Le rapport des artistes modernes à ce processus d'autonomisation sociale peut certes être décrit comme partagé entre une réflexivité autotélique, fondant la conception des œuvres sur l'exclusion de tout élément jugé non-artistique, et une volonté d'engagement ou d'intervention, manifestant l'ambition d'imposer leurs normes au monde extérieur (ROCHLITZ, 1994). Mais cette distinction théorique ne coïncide pas avec une bipartition effective en deux courants parallèles, sous-jacents à tout le développement de l'art aux XIX^e^ et XX^e^ siècles – comme le défend par exemple Antoine Compagnon en opposant avant-garde et modernité (COMPAGNON, 1990). Elle renvoie plutôt à une tension interne à nombre de mouvements, de carrières artistiques et même d'œuvres individuelles, admettant diverses gradations, diverses manières de poser, de contourner ou de brouiller cette alternative (NOUDELMAN, 2000, p. 71 ; COTTINGTON, 2005, p. 10-13).

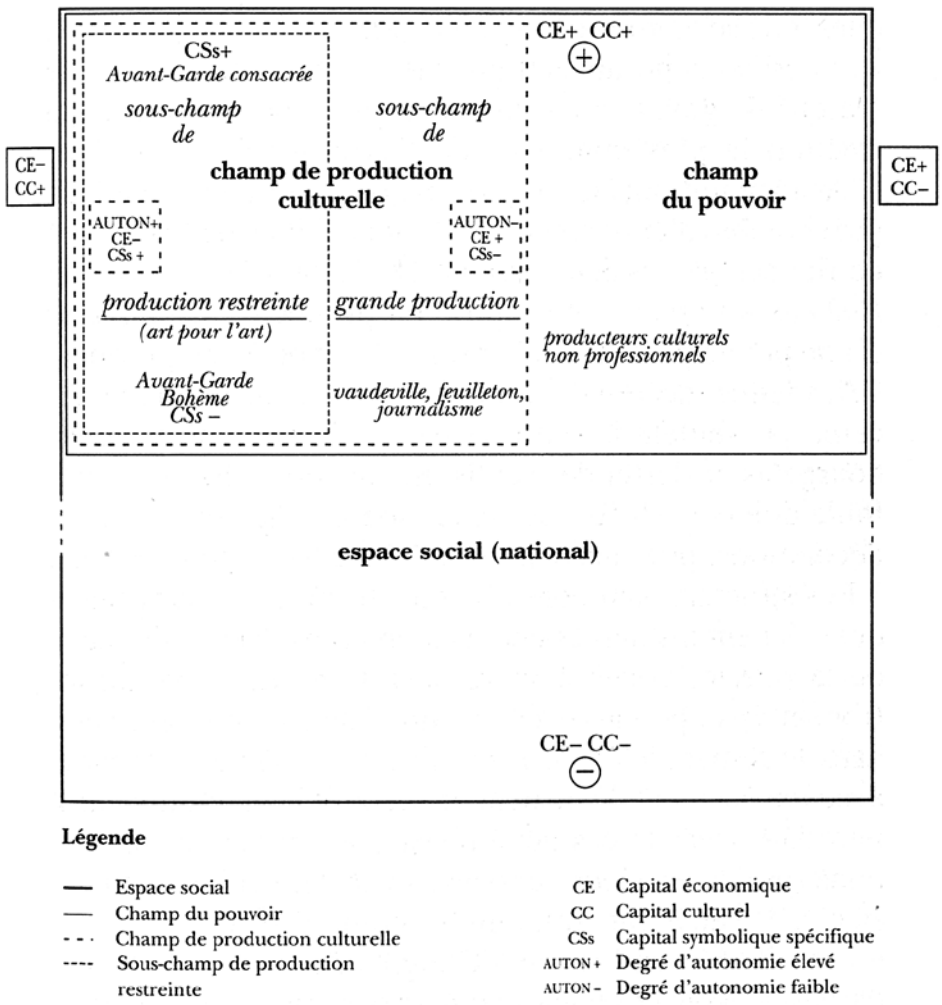
Sans pousser plus avant cette analyse, il est clair, à tout le moins, que la défense de l'autonomie sociale de l'art ne passe pas nécessairement par le formalisme, comme le présupposait Greenberg, pas plus que la critique de l'art pour l'art ne vaut comme dépassement de l'autonomie sociale de l'art, comme le prétendait Bürger.

Art moderne et autonomie sociale de l'art

Faut-il conclure de ces dernières remarques que les avant-gardes se définiraient par la défense et l'approfondissement de l'autonomie *sociale* de l'art ? C'est, pour partie, la thèse de Bourdieu. Celui-ci fonde en effet son analyse de la dynamique des avant-gardes sur une bipartition du champ de l'art entre un pôle autonome et un pôle hétéronome, qui redouble la séparation entre le champ de l'art considéré dans son ensemble et les espaces sociaux extérieurs dont il s'est (relativement) autonomisé (**fig. 2** ; BOURDIEU, 1991). L'avant-garde apparaît ainsi comme la pointe avancée de l'autonomisation du champ artistique, qu'elle conforte en retour, en affirmant, par ses écarts vis-à-vis des conventions établies, le droit exclusif et inconditionnel de l'artiste à définir les règles qui régissent la production de ses œuvres.

Sans récuser ce modèle de la structure du champ de l'art moderne en tant que tel, on peut en revanche discuter sa généalogie historique (FABIANI, 1993, p. 162-164). En effet, les débuts de l'autonomisation du champ de l'art sont antérieurs aux avant-gardes, comme l'ont montré un certain nombre d'auteurs qui, tout en reprenant le cadre d'analyse bourdieusien, contestent sa focalisation trop exclusive sur la fin du XIX^e^ siècle. En mettant en lumière d'autres moments décisifs de formation et de transformation des institutions artistiques – la Renaissance, le siècle classique ou l'époque romantique –, ils indiquent que l'autonomisation de l'art doit plutôt être analysée sur une longue durée ponctuée d'étapes et de ruptures, au sein d'un récit non linéaire[4].

D'autre part, l'autonomie du champ de l'art a survécu aux avant-gardes. On peut toujours distinguer aujourd'hui des artistes qui tendent à se conformer à des demandes sociales extérieures (commerciales ou idéologiques) et d'autres qui privilégient la reconnaissance



2. Pierre Bourdieu, « Champ de production culturelle dans le champ du pouvoir et dans l'espace social », dans BOURDIEU, 1992, p. 207.

des pairs. Ce sont ces derniers qui continuent d'être situés à l'avant-garde dans nombre de travaux sociologiques et économiques (MOULIN, 1992, p. 70 ; COWEN, TABARROK, 2000 ; BUCHHOLZ, 2022, p. 70), alors même que le terme n'est plus employé par les historiens de l'art et les acteurs du champ de l'art, qui le considèrent comme une catégorie historique, inadaptée pour décrire la production artistique contemporaine. Non seulement cela complique l'articulation de la sociologie avec les débats théoriques et historiographiques très nourris qui entourent ce concept (LAMOUREUX, 2006 ; EBURNE, FELSKI, 2010 ; MAGERSKI, 2011 ; ASHOLT, 2014), mais c'est aussi, plus spécifiquement, un problème pour qui cherche à analyser la fin des avant-gardes en s'appuyant sur les apports des sciences sociales.

Autrement dit, si l'assimilation de l'avant-garde au purisme apparaît trop restreinte, son identification à l'autonomie sociale de l'art apparaît en revanche trop large et conduit à détacher la notion d'avant-garde au sens sociologique de ses usages émiques. Il apparaît donc nécessaire de caractériser de manière plus spécifique le rapport entre avant-gardes et autonomie sociale de l'art.

De l'art moderne à l'art contemporain : une rupture socio-institutionnelle

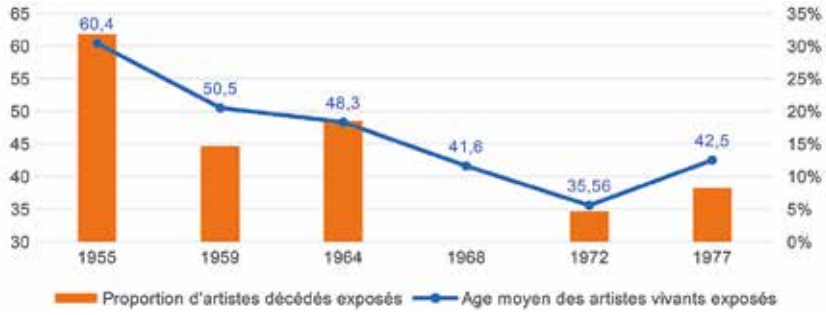
La conversion des institutions publiques à l'art d'avant-garde

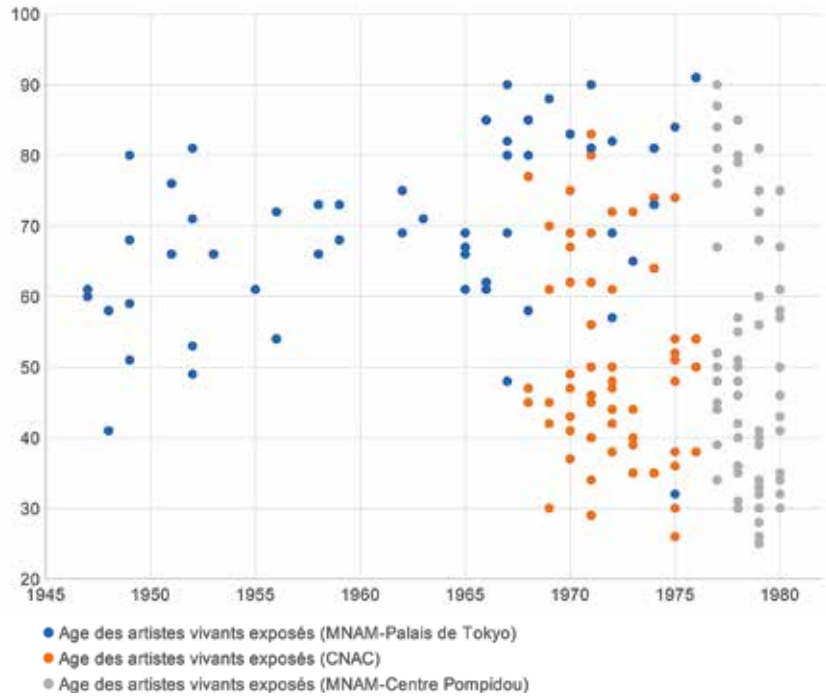
Le moment où s'impose le discours sur la fin des avant-gardes correspond bien à un changement majeur à leur égard. Les institutions mêmes contre lesquelles les avant-gardes avaient le plus vivement affirmé leur liberté de transgression et d'innovation se mettent, dans les années 1960-1970, à soutenir leurs œuvres et à embrasser leurs valeurs – contribuant de ce fait à redéfinir le partage, au sein du champ de l'art, entre autonomie et hétéronomie.

Le changement le plus frappant, sur lequel a porté mon enquête, est celui des institutions publiques. La genèse et l'expansion des avant-gardes en Europe, du milieu du XIX^e^ siècle jusqu'à la Première Guerre mondiale, sont en effet étroitement corrélées à la contestation et à l'affaiblissement progressif des systèmes officiels d'administration des beaux-arts (PARET, 1980 ; CHARLE, 2015, p. 249-262 ; JOYEUX-PRUNEL, 2016, p. 149-188), dont les académies nationales, leurs écoles, leurs prix et leurs expositions périodiques constituent les instruments centraux. Même après le déclin de ces systèmes, jusqu'au milieu du XX^e^ siècle, les innovations artistiques des modernes n'obtiennent au mieux – quand elles ne sont pas franchement réprimées – qu'une reconnaissance tardive et sporadique de la part des instances officielles et des grands musées nationaux, bien souvent au prix d'une atténuation de leurs aspects les plus transgressifs et de leur intégration dans un récit continuiste, esthète, souvent national, de l'histoire de l'art[5]. C'est à l'aune de cette relation séculaire d'hostilité mutuelle que doit être mesuré le bouleversement – aujourd'hui banalisé – qu'a constitué la conversion des institutions publiques à l'art d'avant-garde, à partir des années 1960.

Un indicateur statistique atteste ce grand renversement : la mesure de l'âge des artistes exposés par plusieurs institutions centrales du monde de l'art révèle un net rajeunissement à cette période (**fig. 3a-b**). S'il ne suffit pas à établir l'orientation de ces institutions vers l'avant-garde – il y a, bien sûr, de jeunes artistes conventionnels et de vieux novateurs –, il en est néanmoins l'une des conditions nécessaires et donc l'un de ses indices quantifiables les plus probants : les avant-gardes sont en majorité lancées par de nouveaux entrants dans le champ artistique, tandis que l'art consacré est généralement le fait d'une génération vieillie (BOURDIEU, 1992, p. 213-221). L'analyse quantitative des acquisitions du Centre national des arts plastiques – la collection d'État française, créée en 1791 – conforte cette hypothèse. Après avoir atteint un plancher historique dans les années 1830-1840, la moyenne d'âge des artistes achetés par l'État augmente (de façon discontinue) jusqu'aux années 1960-1970, période où elle baisse à nouveau. La part des artistes achetés pour la première fois croît à partir de 1958 et devient majoritaire de 1968 aux années 1980, signalant le passage des « valeurs sûres » à la « jeune création » (JEANPIERRE, 2020).

C'est ce que confirme surtout une analyse qualitative de l'histoire de ces musées, centres d'art et biennales. S'il est impossible de la détailler entièrement dans l'espace de cet article[6], nous pouvons néanmoins nous attarder sur deux cas emblématiques, le Musée national d'art moderne (MNAM) en France et la Documenta de Cassel en Allemagne[7] – deux des principales instances de consécration pour l'art contemporain, non seulement dans leurs pays respectifs, mais aussi à une échelle transnationale. La simple comparaison de photographies d'expositions organisées dans ces lieux, des années 1950 et du tournant des années 1970, donne un aperçu frappant du basculement qui s'est opéré dans ce court laps de temps.





3a. Nicolas Heimendinger, le rajeunissement des artistes allemands exposés à la Documenta, de 1955 à 1977, dans HEIMENDINGER, 2022a.

3b. Nicolas Heimendinger, l'évolution de l'âge des artistes vivants exposés au Musée national d'art moderne et au Centre national d'art contemporain, de 1947 à 1980 (expositions monographiques), dans HEIMENDINGER, 2022a.

Conçue lors de sa première édition en 1955 dans une logique essentiellement rétrospective (**fig. 4a**), la Documenta reste fondée jusqu'en 1964 sur une approche esthète et dépolitisée de l'art moderne, réduit à un récit téléologique s'achevant par le triomphe de l'abstraction, au détriment de tout un pan des avant-gardes historiques comme de la création la plus récente (KIMPEL, 1997, p. 256-273). Il faut attendre 1968 pour que seules les œuvres produites depuis la dernière édition soient alors exposées à Cassel (ENGLER, 2005). Mais c'est surtout l'édition de 1972, organisée par Harald Szeemann, qui fait place, au-delà du couple peinture-sculpture, aux médiums les plus expérimentaux de l'époque : environnements et happenings, art conceptuel et Land Art, etc. (**fig. 4b**). Sa conception même, du choix des œuvres à la scénographie

4a. Günther Becker, vue de la grande salle des sculptures, au rez-de-chaussée du Museum Fridericianum, 1955, lors de la Ire Documenta de Cassel.

en passant par les discours d'accompagnement, repose sur le questionnement et le brouillage de la frontière entre art, non-art et anti-art (BREMER, 2016).

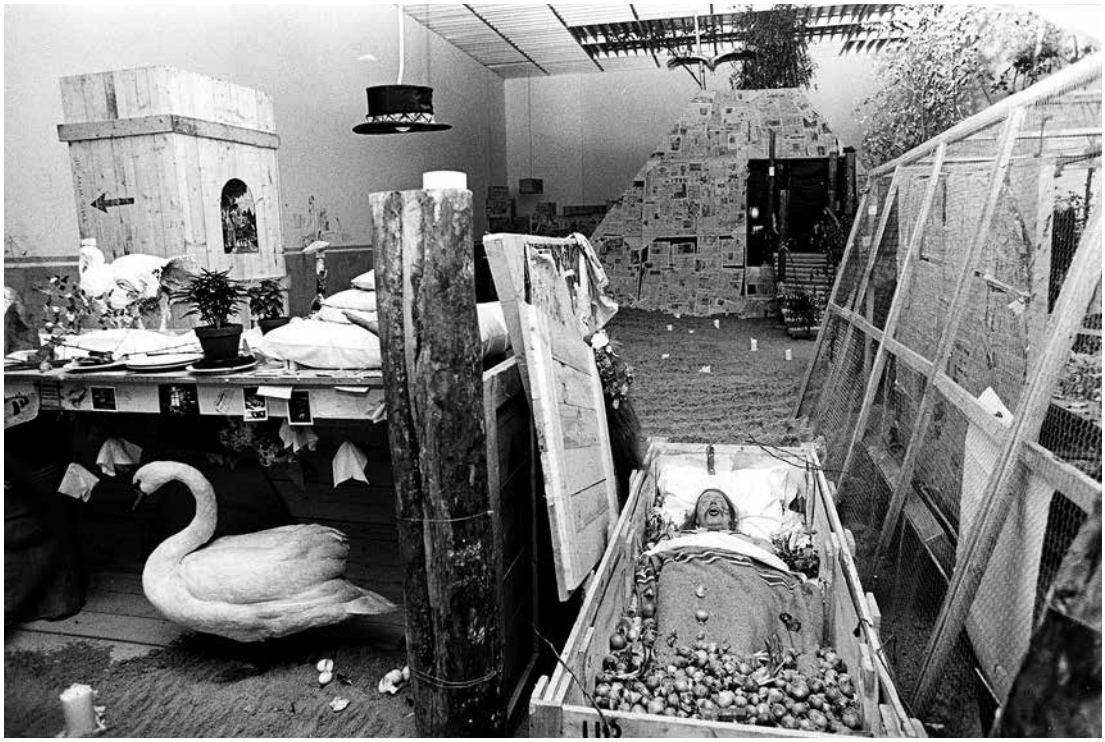
Ce changement de direction artistique ne touche donc pas qu'au contenu et à la programmation des lieux d'exposition, mais altère leur cadre même, de leur architecture à la manière dont leurs responsables se représentent leurs missions. C'est particulièrement sensible dans le cas du MNAM, incarnation des révolutions muséographiques des années 1970. Sous la direction de Pontus Hultén, de 1973 à 1981, le musée inclut dans ses collections comme dans ses expositions des œuvres d'avant-garde, historiques et contemporaines, qui avaient longtemps été marginalisées par les musées et les administrations publiques en France – de Dada et du surréalisme à l'art cinétique et au Nouveau Réalisme (DUFRÊNE, 2000 ; CRIQUI, LIUCCI-GOUTNIKOV, 2018). Mais la grande nouveauté de Beaubourg est d'abord celle de l'enveloppe muséale : alors que le précédent hôte du MNAM, le palais de Tokyo, reproduisait les formules vieillies, monumentales et solennelles d'un « palais des Arts » (**fig. 5a**) et avait été à ce titre considéré d'emblée comme un échec (MINNAERT, 2012 ; SCHULMANN, 2012 ; FELLMANN, 2019), le Centre Pompidou est inspiré, dans son architecture et son intégration urbaine mêmes, par le projet avant-gardiste d'une fusion de l'art et de la vie (DEROO, 2014 ; VIOLEAU, 2017, p. 86). L'un des meilleurs symboles de cette ambition est son forum, grand espace au rez-de-chaussée alors librement ouvert à tous les passants, où s'échafaudent dans les premières années du Centre de vastes installations aux allures de fête foraine, comme le *Crocrodrome* de Bernhard Luginbühl, Niki de Saint-Phalle, Daniel Spoerri et Jean Tinguely en 1977 ou *La Kermesse héroïque* de Salvador Dalí en 1979 (**fig. 5b**).

Il s'agit donc non seulement d'une rupture historique dans le choix des objets exposés – d'un modernisme tempéré et historicisé à un art plus radicalement anti-conventionnel, présenté dans le temps de son actualité – mais aussi d'un changement radical de leurs modalités d'exposition – d'une muséalisation de l'avant-garde à une avant-gardisation du musée.

Qu'en est-il du marché de l'art ? Quelques hypothèses

Cette enquête sur les transformations des lieux d'exposition publics pourrait être étendue à d'autres catégories d'acteurs artistiques, et notamment au marché de l'art, dont les évolutions semblent à la fois convergentes et distinctes.

Contredisant le lieu commun de l'artiste maudit, les artistes liés aux avant-gardes historiques n'ont pas dédaigné les stratégies commerciales et les succès marchands : ils ont pu au contraire s'appuyer sur les libertés nouvelles qu'offrait le marché de l'art pour contourner le conservatisme des institutions officielles et muséales, comme l'ont montré, depuis l'ouvrage pionnier des White ([1965] 2009), un certain nombre d'études (JENSEN,



4b. Paul Thek, *Ark*, 1972, vue de l'installation à la V^e^ Documenta, section « Mythologies individuelles » (photographie de Brigitte Hellgoth).

1994 ; FITZGERALD, 1996 ; JOYEUX-PRUNEL, 2009). Mais il semble que l'art dit académique et les artistes les plus conventionnels aient conservé pendant longtemps des positions dominantes sur le marché de l'art – plus longtemps que ne le disent les White (GALENSON, JENSEN, 2002 ; JOYEUX-PRUNEL, 2010 ; CHARLE, 2015, p. 249-261 ; SAINT-RAYMOND, 2019) – avant leur lente dévaluation au profit d'un art plus jeune et expérimental.

Autrement dit, alors que les orientations artistiques des institutions publiques démontrent, dans leur ensemble, un renversement radical et tardif au cours du XX^e^ siècle, passant d'un conservatisme esthétique assez généralisé et parfois franchement répressif au rôle de premier soutien de l'art novateur et expérimental, les acteurs marchands semblent avoir suivi, quant à eux, une trajectoire plus précoce, plus progressive, mais aussi plus limitée d'approfondissement de leur soutien à l'art d'avant-garde – partant de positions en moyenne moins conservatrices, mais atteignant aussi des orientations relativement moins expérimentales *in fine* (MOULIN, 1992, p. 68-75 ; BUCHHOLZ, 2022). Une telle hypothèse reste toutefois à mettre à l'épreuve.

La fin des avant-gardes

La mise en lumière du rôle nouveau occupé par les institutions publiques dans le soutien à l'art contemporain met à mal les analyses qui associent trop rapidement les instances étatiques à un facteur d'hétéronomie – de même que les enquêtes précédemment citées sur les liaisons entre art moderne et marché de l'art complexifient l'assimilation mécanique des acteurs commerciaux au pôle hétéronome du champ de l'art. Il ne s'agit pas là pour autant de faire une apologie du marché et/ou de l'État en tant que tels : ni l'un

5a. Photographe anonyme, scénographie des collections du premier Musée national d'art moderne au palais de Tokyo, salle Pierre Bonnard, avant 1960, dans FELLMANN, 2019, p. 663.

ni l'autre ne sont par principe émancipateurs pour l'art, mais ils peuvent le devenir dans certaines conditions. C'est dire que l'autonomie artistique doit être pensée en termes relatifs, par comparaison entre les effets de deux configurations sociales et historiques spécifiques, et non pas comme un attribut consubstantiel à un type d'organisation en particulier : selon les contextes, l'État ou le marché peuvent consolider ou affaiblir un certain degré acquis de liberté de création artistique, être érigés en adversaires ou en alliés par des artistes en quête d'autonomie (PACOURET, HAUCHECORNE, 2019).

Quelle autonomie pour les avant-gardes ?

De telles considérations invitent à reconsidérer le sens de l'opposition canonique entre art moderne et art académique, que l'on tend à assimiler de manière trop mécanique à celle entre art autonome et art hétéronome. Souvent désigné par la formule dépréciative d'« art officiel », l'art académique se trouve ainsi amalgamé à toutes les formes d'art d'État et notamment à la culture de propagande des régimes autoritaires. Ces deux types de production artistique (art académique et culture de propagande) sont pourtant, de toute évidence, bien différents. La seconde repose sur une régulation coercitive de la production et de la diffusion des œuvres (par la loi, voire la violence d'État). De ce fait, elle résulte de l'intervention, assumée comme telle, d'une puissance extérieure au champ artistique, appuyée sur des organes de contrôle créés ou réformés à cet effet (STEINWEIS, 1993 ; ANY, 2020). La régulation académique s'appuie quant à elle sur des institutions internes au champ (académies, écoles des beaux-arts, salons) et des dispositifs de sélection spécialisés (jurys de pairs), qui empêchent de fait les artistes jugés non conformes d'accéder aux principaux titres de reconnaissance, mais ne leur interdisent pas en droit de produire, d'exposer et de vendre les œuvres qu'ils veulent (DUPIN DE BEYSSAT, 2022). En ce sens, ils sont fondés sur la légitimité (même discutée) que veulent bien leur accorder les artistes et autres acteurs du monde de l'art : alors que le contrôle culturel des régimes autoritaires peut se perpétuer en dépit de l'opposition des professionnels de l'art, la « crise de la croyance » dans la validité des normes et des jugements des représentants académiques vaut crise et déclin des institutions académiques elles-mêmes (BOURDIEU, 2013, p. 243-247).

Corrélativement, le contrôle académique s'exerce au nom de la promotion et de la défense de normes de qualité proprement artistiques, partagées par une large partie des artistes, auxquels elles ont été inculquées dès leur formation (BOIME, 1971). L'art de propagande des régimes autoritaires, quant à lui, conditionne les choix plastiques à l'efficacité idéologique : il se fonde donc, en dernier ressort, sur des critères non artistiques, dont l'application contraint certains artistes à changer le type d'œuvres qu'ils produisent ordinairement (voire à cesser tout à fait d'en produire)[8]. Il est, en ce sens, l'exact envers de l'autonomie sociale de l'art, tandis qu'en prenant pour cible l'art académique, les avant-gardes ne s'attaquent pas à une source d'hétéronomie *per se*[9]. Au contraire, en instituant la prévalence du jugement des pairs sur les demandes du commanditaire,

les académies ont, entre la fin de la Renaissance et le XVIII[e] siècle, encouragé le développement de critères d'appréciation et de modalités de reconnaissance spécifiques, établis et partagés par la communauté des artistes ou des écrivains – et donc favorisé l'autonomisation du champ (VIALA, 1985). De fait, dès la fin du XVIII[e] siècle, les scandales provoqués par des œuvres censées bafouer l'ordre moral, politique ou religieux se multiplient au Salon du Louvre (YANG, 2023).

En ce sens, dans la seconde moitié du XIX[e] siècle, les premiers artistes modernes font plutôt émerger une nouvelle ligne de partage, plus restrictive qu'auparavant, entre autonomie et hétéronomie. Ce ne sont pas seulement les ingérences de puissances extérieures qui sont contestées (l'État, l'Église, le parti, etc.) et l'imposition de demandes ou de critères d'évaluation non artistiques (politiques, religieux, moraux, utilitaires…). Désormais, même des conventions formées au sein du champ, défendues (de manière active ou réactive) par des pairs réunis au sein d'institutions spécialisées, peuvent apparaître comme des contraintes, s'opposant à l'expression libre du talent original et toujours plus individualisé de l'artiste. C'est la condition pour qu'émerge ce mode de consécration caractéristique des avant-gardes, renversant le principe de la régulation académique, où la valeur des œuvres est mesurée à l'aune de leur opposition (et non plus de leur conformité) aux conventions artistiques de leur temps – ce que Bourdieu désignait comme l'« institutionnalisation de l'anomie » (BOURDIEU, 1987) : à savoir une rivalité pour la reconnaissance artistique débordant presque systématiquement vers une redéfinition des normes d'après lesquelles s'établit cette reconnaissance, plaçant ces normes, de ce fait, dans une situation

5b. Jacques Faujour, vue de *La Kermesse héroïque*, installation de Salvador Dalí, dans le forum du Centre Pompidou à l'occasion de sa rétrospective, 18 déc. 1979 – 21 avr. 1980, Paris, archives du Musée national d'art moderne – Centre Pompidou.

d'instabilité chronique. De ce point de vue, l'émergence de l'art moderne au XIXe siècle n'est pas seulement conditionnée à l'affirmation de l'autonomie sociale de l'art, mais elle apparaît comme un moment de radicalisation d'une autonomie sociale pour partie acquise.

L'art contemporain ou la victoire paradoxale des avant-gardes

Comment comprendre, dans ce cadre, la clôture de l'art moderne ? La fin des avant-gardes ne signifie pas, en tout cas, que l'on ne puisse plus différencier, d'un point de vue purement descriptif, des œuvres plus ou moins conventionnelles. Comme l'a montré récemment Larissa Buchholz, il est tout à fait possible de décrire l'art contemporain, au XXIe siècle, comme un champ structuré entre un pôle autonome et un pôle hétéronome (BUCHHOLZ, 2022). Mais les transformations socio-institutionnelles que nous avons décrites ont pour premier résultat que le pôle hétéronome, qui ne l'est jamais que de manière relative, défend aujourd'hui un art en moyenne moins conventionnel que par le passé. En conséquence, la bipartition du champ de l'art entre un pôle autonome et un pôle hétéronome semble moins accusée dans l'art contemporain que dans l'art moderne : là où l'écart entre œuvres traditionnelles et œuvres d'avant-garde paraît extrêmement marqué dans la première moitié du XXe siècle, les deux catégories d'artistes s'appuyant sur des réseaux de soutien très différenciés, la polarisation entre l'art le plus expérimental et l'art le plus conventionnel semble aujourd'hui admettre une gradation plus continue. De fait, ils peuvent voisiner au sein des mêmes institutions, galeries et revues (BAIA CURIONI, RIZZI, 2016).

D'autre part et surtout, ses représentants tendent à calquer leurs stratégies de valorisation sur les critères qui ont cours au pôle autonome : c'est généralement au nom même des valeurs autrefois les plus caractéristiques des avant-gardes – innovation, subversion politique ou morale, succès de scandale, etc. – que sont aujourd'hui promus certains des artistes pourtant les plus commerciaux[10]. Alors que l'arrière-garde pouvait autrefois attaquer l'art moderne au nom d'un système de valeurs opposé (et vice-versa), ses homologues aujourd'hui se défendent, paradoxalement, de tout conservatisme esthétique. Ce changement conduit à dissoudre la relation agonistique entre pôle autonome et pôle hétéronome, dont on comprend donc qu'elle constituait un élément définitoire des avant-gardes : celles-ci ne se *différenciaient* pas seulement des arrière-gardes, mais elles s'y *opposaient*.

Autrement dit, on assiste à partir des années 1960 à un affaiblissement progressif du clivage entre les pôles autonome et hétéronome qui structurait le champ depuis les débuts de l'art moderne, non pas au détriment de l'autonomie de l'art, comme il est parfois dit (LÜTTICKEN, 2017 ; ULLRICH, 2022), mais au contraire à son avantage, celle-ci étant désormais embrassée et soutenue (en façade du moins) jusque dans ses implications les plus radicales par l'intégralité ou presque des composantes du champ artistique.

Les débats postmodernistes et, plus généralement, l'analyse de la transition entre art moderne et art contemporain sont donc obscurcis, comme nous avons essayé de le montrer, par les confusions croisées entre trois notions. Les phénomènes d'avant-garde, d'esthétiques puristes et d'autonomisation sociale de l'art, s'ils sont historiquement et logiquement liés, ne doivent pas être assimilés les uns aux autres. En conséquence, la rupture, au tournant des années 1960, vis-à-vis d'un modernisme abstrait et formaliste, jusqu'alors prédominant dans le champ de l'art états-unien, ne vaut pas fin des avant-gardes – comme le laisse entendre une historiographie américano-centrée toujours influente. La fin des avant-gardes ne signifie pas non plus la fin de l'autonomie sociale de l'art, dont l'établissement précède

nettement l'émergence de l'art moderne et lui survit aujourd'hui – bien qu'elle soit, comme par le passé, régulièrement menacée par des adversaires anciens ou nouveaux. C'est une conception radicalisée de cette autonomie sociale de l'art qu'ont défendu les artistes modernes, en érigeant en adversaires, non plus seulement les ingérences de puissances extérieures au champ de l'art, mais des systèmes de régulation internes, solidaires de conventions artistiques jugées désormais contraignantes par principe. Ce conflit entre convention et innovation, qui constituait depuis le XIXe siècle le principe structurant de la distribution des positions au sein du champ de l'art, aussi bien que de ses dynamiques d'évolution historique (BOURDIEU, 1992), est désarmé dans les années 1960-1970 par la conversion à l'art d'avant-garde des acteurs qui lui avaient été historiquement les plus hostiles. Ainsi compris, l'épuisement des avant-gardes résulte moins de leurs échecs ou de leur délégitimation que de la généralisation de leurs valeurs au sein du champ de l'art (HUYSSEN, 1995, p. 17-23 ; BEYME, 2005, p. 844).

Pour Huyssen, le second postmodernisme – celui des années 1970-1980 – se caractérisait par « par une dispersion et une dissémination toujours plus grandes des pratiques artistiques » (HUYSSEN, 1984, p. 25). L'auteur rejoignait en cela les nombreux critiques qui avaient annoncé, à partir de la fin des années 1970, l'avènement d'une ère « pluraliste » (BOURDON, CONE, KINGSLEY *et al.*, 1980 ; DOGLIANI, 1980, p. 196 ; SANDLER, 1980 ; DANTO, 1996, p. 12). Pourtant, un tel discours ne peut être justifié par l'augmentation particulière du nombre ou de la diversité des tendances artistiques à cette période. L'art a été marqué, à d'autres moments du XXe siècle, par la succession rapide d'innovations artistiques variées, sans qu'on ne déduise du sentiment d'éparpillement qui en résultait l'avènement d'une époque « postmoderne » : au contraire, ce chaos apparaissait caractéristiquement moderne[11]. Celui-ci restait toutefois polarisé par la relation d'opposition réciproque entre ces multiples tendances novatrices et les défenseurs institués d'un art de convention. C'est l'adoption par ces derniers des valeurs anti-conventionnelles des avant-gardes qui fait disparaître un principe majeur d'ordonnancement des tendances coexistant dans le champ artistique à un moment donné. Une telle disparition laisse dans son sillage l'impression d'une dispersion inorganisée des positions artistiques et peut se traduire par une forme de désorientation historique, que Jean-François Lyotard a théorisée avec le succès que l'on sait comme une « fin des grands récits ».

Replacé dans l'histoire longue, le temps des avant-gardes apparaît ainsi comme une grande période de transition, des débuts de la dérégulation des modes de production et d'appréciation des arts au XIXe siècle (CHARLE, 2015), jusqu'à son parachèvement un siècle plus tard, au terme d'un long processus de déclin et de délégitimation des forces de résistance traditionnelles à cette dérégulation. Cette victoire a toutefois une contrepartie. Dès lors que ces valeurs avant-gardistes sont partagées par la quasi-totalité des acteurs du monde de l'art, elles tendent à ne plus rencontrer d'opposition qu'extérieure, c'est-à-dire surtout celle du public profane. Il devient plus difficile, dans ces conditions, de faire jouer ce que Pierre-Michel Menger décrit comme le « syllogisme » de l'avant-garde (MENGER, 2001, p. 179), reposant sur l'assimilation du combat contre le conservatisme esthétique au combat contre la domination des classes dirigeantes. Dans la mesure où les distinctions officielles, la reconnaissance muséale ou la valorisation marchande leur sont désormais acquises ou, du moins, ne leur sont pas opposées en principe, les subversions artistiques risquent d'apparaître comme des agressions dirigées uniquement contre le goût conventionnel du public profane et ne peuvent plus guère assimiler l'hostilité de celui-ci aux répressions d'un ordre politique, social ou moral dominant. L'affirmation de l'autonomie artistique tend ainsi à perdre sa dimension oppositionnelle pour ne plus laisser subsister que l'impression d'un monde social autarcique et exclusif[12] : le dédain pour le goût « bourgeois » ou « officiel » se mue en embarras face aux rejets du goût « populaire ».

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NOTES

1. Pour n'en citer qu'un exemple, le critique littéraire Albert Thibaudet suggérait dès 1935 que « la révolution symboliste, la dernière jusqu'ici, aura peut-être été la dernière absolument, parce qu'elle a incorporé le motif de la révolution chronique à l'état normal de la littérature » (Cité dans MARX, 2014, p. 37).

2. Je reprends cette désignation générique à GOODMAN, (1977) 2006, à des fins de clarification. Estebán Buch désigne quant à lui cette position comme la « version forte » de l'autonomie (affirmant la spécificité des valeurs artistiques), distincte d'une version « faible » (affirmant seulement le principe d'autorégulation des acteurs artistiques), qui correspond à ce que j'appelle ici « autonomie sociale de l'art » (BUCH, 2014). L'important, au-delà de la question de vocabulaire, est de bien distinguer les deux sens visés.

3. Comme le souligne John Dewey, dans les sociétés prémodernes, « on n'aurait alors pas même compris l'idée de "l'art pour l'art" » ([1934] 2010, p. 37).

4. C'est surtout dans le domaine des études littéraires que l'interprétation de la modernité baudelairienne et flaubertienne par Bourdieu comme moment exclusif d'autonomisation du champ a été discutée (SAINT-JACQUES, VIALA, 1994 ; JURT, 1999 ; GLINOER, 2007).

5. Voir, par exemple, pour le cas français : MONNIER, 1995 ; LEEMAN, 2010.

6. Je me permets de renvoyer, pour de plus longs développements, à HEIMENDINGER, 2022a.

7. La Documenta est une organisation de droit privé, mais contrôlée et financée par la Ville de Cassel, le ministère de la Culture du Land de Hesse et le ministère de l'Intérieur fédéral, qui assurent à cette période l'essentiel de son budget (SCHNECKENBURGER, 1983 ; GLASMEIER, STENGEL, 2005).

8. Bien que ces régimes ne soient pas toujours, sur le plan culturel, aussi intégralement répressifs qu'on ne le représente d'ordinaire : ils peuvent admettre une certaine diversité esthétique et tolérer des espaces (ou des périodes) de relâchement relatif des contraintes idéologiques pesant sur la production artistique (ARNOUX, 2014 ; MILBACH, 2018 ; BARREIRO LÓPEZ, 2023).

9. Une semblable analyse pourrait être faite de l'opposition des avant-gardes à l'art commercial et au goût « bourgeois » : historiquement, le marché de l'art a représenté un instrument d'émancipation vis-à-vis de la contrainte plus directe et généralement plus hétéronome du commanditaire (ALPERS, [1988] 1991).

10. Buchholz montre comment, dans les années 2000, le succès marchand international d'un peintre relativement conventionnel comme Yue Minjun s'est construit grâce à son identification, par divers intermédiaires commerciaux, à une forme de dissidence politique, quand bien même l'artiste n'avait rien exprimé de tel (BUCHHOLZ, 2022, p. 239-241).

11. « Avec une vitesse vertigineuse, le nouvel art s'est scindé en une multitude de directions et d'essais divergents », écrit par exemple Ortega y Gasset en 1925 (ORTEGA Y GASSET, [1925] 2019, p. 23).

12. Ce qui ne signifie pas qu'il le soit plus qu'auparavant : l'art contemporain est bien plus largement diffusé que l'art moderne en son temps, même si son public reste peu diversifié socialement. C'est plutôt que cette autarcie apparaît plus ouvertement, à mesure que disparaissent les sources de résistance internes à l'autonomie artistique : la conversion progressive de l'ensemble des institutions artistiques à un art non-conventionnel peut être perçue comme une clôture du champ sur ses valeurs spécifiques, quand bien même les options défendues autrefois par les académies et les musées des beaux-arts correspondaient plus au goût d'une élite traditionnaliste qu'aux préférences majoritaires du public éloigné de ce champ.

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AUTONOMIE

Perspective interroge ici l'autonomie en art à partir de quelques moments clés comme l'essor de la philosophie esthétique au XVIII^e^ siècle ou encore le formalisme moderniste et les avant-gardes du siècle dernier. Toutefois, peut-on penser cette notion seulement à partir d'usages circonscrits et revendiqués ? Est-il possible d'envisager plus largement les jalons de son histoire ? Historiennes et historiens de l'art, de l'architecture, anthropologues, philosophes et artistes se penchent sur le mythe et la préhistoire de ce concept à travers les liens de l'histoire de l'art aux autres sciences humaines, les rapports de l'art, des œuvres et des artistes aux champs social ou moral et aux luttes politiques, ou encore en approchant les œuvres et les images comme des vecteurs d'émancipation ou des moteurs d'autonomie.

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Avant-garde or democracy? Transformations and Dilemmas of the U.S. public art programme in the 1970s

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ABSTRACT

The "Works of Art in Public Places" programme was established by the National Endowment for the Arts right after its creation in 1965. It first subsidized modernist sculptures from well-known artists. But in the 1970s, it began to support more recent and experimental trends, breaking with modernism, which was then criticized for producing an art disconnected from its social environment. Therefore, public officials attributed to postmodernist site-specific artworks the power to reintegrate art into social life and thus to disseminate it to a wider audience. This aesthetic was favoured less for its observable effects than because it made it possible to (superficially) resolve a fundamental contradiction faced by any arts policy in a liberal-democratic regime, between the recognition of the autonomy of the artist and the will to improve access to the arts.

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In the United States, as in many Western liberal regimes, the development of cultural policies in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in unprecedented support for contemporary art. While public patronage of living artists was not new as such, these policies were distinguished by the volume of resources they allocated for this purpose and, more surprisingly, by their positive reception of avant-garde art. This represented a major break in the history of modern art, which was shaped from its origin, in nineteenth century Europe, by the opposition to the artistic conservatism of national academies and other state control bodies (Charle, 2015, pp. 249–262; Mainardi, 1993). It was also, reciprocally, an unprecedented shift in the long history of arts policies. Indeed, this commitment to avant-garde art broke with the traditional forms of state intervention in contemporary art: until then they favoured not only conventional art, but also an art more or less attuned to the interests of the ruling power and designed to convey a certain ideology, be it national, partisan, moral, religious, etc. Conversely, support for the avant-garde was fundamentally conditioned to the recognition of the autonomy of art, on which depends the very possibility for artists to question the aesthetic and moral conventions of their time.

Should we then conclude that these liberal regimes began to support, in the last third of the twentieth century, an art that did not respond to any political interest, to any public demand, to any problem external to the sole concerns of artists? Does the turn towards

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avant-garde art mean that the public authorities have given up any objective and motivation of their own when they intervene in the field of art? This would be, of course, a naïve understanding of these transformations. These new art policies intended to promote autonomous art and creative freedom but this did not mean that state authorities gave up on governmental intentions or political motivations. Nevertheless, these policies had to forge compromises between artists' freedom, social constraints, and political objectives (Vestheim, 2012).

This article examines more closely the new nature of these compromises, by focusing on a type of cultural intervention that illustrates more than any other the close relationship between art and power, namely the commissioning of public artworks by the state. Indeed, public art is not mediated by a specialized institution, inserted in the field of art, as a museum can be. Because of that, it is more likely to be subjected to heteronomous forces[1], especially when it is publicly funded. However, this heteronomy is not always the result of the subjection of public art to the cynical pursuit of ideological or personal interests by political power. It also stems from the need in a democracy to take into account the taste of the general public, who generally have little appreciation for the unconventional works that autonomous art tends to produce. And the commissioning of public art, more than any other type of government intervention in the arts, confronts artworks with an audience that is neither prepared nor asking for them. As such, it exacerbates the difficulties that public authorities can encounter in reconciling support for contemporary art with the democratization of art. The "Works of Art in Public Places" programme established in 1965 by the newly created U.S. federal arts agency, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), represents a revealing case study in this regard, as it underwent significant transformations in terms of aesthetics at the turn of the 1970s, which resulted directly from a desire to resolve or overcome this fundamental tension. In other words, as I will try to demonstrate, the artistic choices and the social duties of cultural administrations are not independent but mutually conditional. The transformations of the American art scene during this period prompted this administration to rethink the social meaning of public art. And, conversely, the need to confront the difficult problem of the democratization of art led officials to embrace certain neo-avant-garde tendencies deemed more capable than post-war modernism of bridging the gap between the public and contemporary art.

The study of this evolution requires the association of disciplines and methods that still communicate too little: sociologists of culture[2] and historians of cultural policies[3] rarely venture into the stylistic analysis of artworks, while historians and theoreticians of modern and contemporary art may not have yet fully exploited the potential benefits of empirical investigations into the institutions of the art field. In addition to bibliographic resources drawn from these various fields of research, the present article relies on primary sources collected in several archival holdings – mainly those of the National Endowment for the Arts held at the National Archives.

Federal government and the arts in the United States: the story of an impeded relationship

As is well known, the United States differs from European countries in that it lacked a substantial and consistent cultural policy at both the federal and states levels before the 1960s. There are several reasons for this, including the absence of a tradition of

monarchical patronage on its territory; the widespread support to a principle of *limited government*, which tends to restrain state intervention, in culture as in any other sector; or the long-standing distrust of the fine arts, seen as a corrupting luxury – a distrust nourished by the Puritanism of the first colonies[4] and the severe republicanism that prevailed in post-revolutionary America (Harris, 1966). These combined factors can explain the poor reception of the first attempts of the federal government to commission public artworks in the first half of the nineteenth century. The purchase of a series of paintings of John Trumbull on the American Revolution, destined for the rotunda of the Capitol, where they still hang, was considered to be excessively expensive when they were publicly presented for the first time (Smith, 2008, pp. 19–20). And the monumental sculpture of George Washington in an antique style, commissioned to Horatio Greenough in the 1830s, was completely misunderstood in Jacksonian America: the work was criticized as ridiculous, pompous and too close to the artistic formulas of monarchical Europe [Figure 1] (Burns & Davis, 2009, pp. 359–367). These failures hindered for a long time the development of public art commissioning in the United States,[5] at a time when it was considered doubtful, more generally, that the federal government had any role to play in the life of the arts. At the very least, they demonstrated the difficulty in the nineteenth century of adjusting the traditional aesthetics of public art to the new principles and values of a young democracy.

A first major change occurred with the establishment in 1935 of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a vast public employment plan designed to respond to the economic crisis as part of the "New Deal". This administration, emblematic of the Roosevelt period, included a cultural component, the Federal Project Number One, which itself had a section for the visual arts, the Federal Art Project. During its eight years of existence, it produced nearly 110,000 paintings and 18,000 sculptures (Larkin, 2009, pp. 160–161) and therefore corresponded to an unprecedented moment of expansion of the federal government's funding of public artworks. The thousands of murals produced for various public buildings throughout the country generally adopted a figurative and didactic style, a kind of American-style social realism, a good example of which can be found in the frescoes of Ben Shahn [Figure 2]. But the Federal Art Project was not hostile to modernist trends (Bengelsdorf Browne, 1972) and employed, for example, Stuart Davis, David Smith, Arshile Gorky, Philip Guston, Mark Rothko or Jackson Pollock. In fact, almost all the leading American artists of the 1930s and most of the future big names of the New York School participated in one way or another in the WPA. This shows not so much the flair and taste of the officials as the vast scale of their programmes and the essentially social character of their action, which reached and supported virtually the entire American art world at that time. In other words, artistic criteria played a minor role in the allocation of government funding.

However, as influential and innovative as they were, the WPA's programmes remained responses to a crisis situation and therefore limited in time (Martel, 2006, p. 142). Moreover, their strong social emphasis and inherent links with the New Deal policy exposed them to criticism, not only from the partisan opposition, but also from the fractions of the artworld attached to a more elitist and selective conception of their activity. In February 1943, after several years of attacks on the WPA in which anti-communism played a central role (Harris, 1995, pp. 137–140), all the national projects it supported were closed (*Ibid.*, p. 150).

It was not until the 1960s that this hitherto sporadic and disappointing relationship between the federal state and the arts finally reached a positive (and lasting) outcome.

Figure 1. Horatio Greenough, *Georges Washington*, 1840, marble, 345.4 × 259.1 × 209.6 cm, Smithsonian American Art Museum Collection, Transfer from the U.S. Capitol.

After a complex history I will not recall here,[6] it was Kennedy and especially his successor Lyndon Johnson who finally succeeded in setting up a federal policy for the arts, with the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965. Framed by an anti-dirigiste approach to public intervention in the arts, the NEA refused to exercise direct supervision over any institution and limited itself to allocating incentive subsidies, resulting in a much lower budget than its European counterparts. This was all the more the case in the second half of the 1960s since the NEA then had the status of a pilot administration, with

Figure 2. Ben Shahn, *The Meaning of Social Security* (detail), mural at the Wilbur J. Cohen Federal Building, Washington, D.C. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, photograph by Carol M. Highsmith [reproduction number, e.g. LC-USZ62-123456]

contested legitimacy. However, these limitations, partly chosen, partly imposed, did not prevent it from setting up some ambitious programmes from the outset, including the "Works of Art in Public Places" programme – which was founded, as we shall see, on a very different (and far less social) conception of public art than that which prevailed at the time of the WPA.

The beginnings of the "works of art in public places program": modernism as high culture

Initially named "Sculpture Project" and conceived by René d'Harnoncourt, then director of the MoMA, the "Works of Art in Public Places" programme (WAPP) was one of the very first initiatives launched by the NEA's Visual Arts Program in 1965. It resulted in both the most emblematic and the most controversial works of the NEA in its early days (Harney, 1981, p. 9) – starting with the first of them, Calder's *La Grande Vitesse* which, after raising some local opposition, became one of the symbols of the city of Grand Rapids (*Ibid*., 15–18; Mary McCombie, 1992, pp. 84–113) [Figure 3]. The following projects were in the same vein, focusing on modernist artists already recognized, such as Isamu Noguchi (Seattle, 1968–1969), Tony Smith (Hawaii, 1969–1977) or Louise Nevelson (Scottsdale, 1970–1973) [Figure 4].[7] The first commissioned artworks were thus large abstract sculptures, which certainly remained poorly understood by the general public, but then appeared within the artworld as an already old and museumized art trend, characteristic of the post-war New York School and distant from the radical innovations of the 1960s, such as Pop art, minimal art, conceptual art, and so on.

This has led some authors, such as the historian Donna Binkiewicz, to see in the first artistic choices of the NEA the result of a pervasive conservatism, both aesthetic and political: "While the American visual art scene in the 1960s embraced pop, minimalist, performance, feminist, black, and Chicano arts that were more critical of American society, federal art support continued to favour older modernist forms, such as those generated by abstract expressionist and color-field artists, who had dominated the art world in the 1950s and had earned a reputation as the best representatives of American freedom (Binkiewicz, 2004, p. 122)."

Figure 3. Dedication of Alexander Calder's *La Grande vitesse*, 1969, Grand Rapids (Michigan). Credit: Grand Rapids History Center, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, MI.

Binkiewicz actually applies to the case of the NEA the well-known theses of the so-called "revisionist" historiography of Abstract Expressionism (Cockcroft, 1974; Guilbaut, 1983). According to these authors, abstract art, which emerged as the predominant trend of the American art scene in the 1940s and 1950s, served American propaganda

Figure 4. Louise Nevelson, *Atmosphere and Environments XVIII (Windows to the West)*, 1973. Photo: Brian Passey / Scottsdale Arts.

during the Cold War, once assimilated by a "politics of apolitical culture"[8] conceived as an antithesis to the official Socialist Realism imposed in the USSR. In other words, it is precisely because of its apparent apoliticism that this post-war abstract painting was paradoxically able to serve ideological enterprises, as a symbol of the artistic (and therefore political) liberalism of the United States and the West. Moreover, Abstract Expressionism could be seen as a purely aesthetic avant-garde, whose character of rupture and opposition seemed attenuated and therefore more suitable for official support than a more transgressive and politicized type of avant-garde.

While this analysis may be relevant for the post-war years (although it is disputed),[9] Binkiewicz applies it to the later period of the 1960s in a reductive way. New issues emerged at that time, both in the field of art and in the field of cultural policies, which no longer corresponded to the thesis of abstract art as a "weapon of the Cold War". The first, still cautious choices of the NEA were rather the result of two factors, which have less to do with grand ideological maneuvers than with the constrained framework in which this type of public arts programmes were set up.

On the one hand, commissioning artworks for public spaces generally implies facing a lay public, little aware of current artistic trends. Cultural officials thus tend to prefer rather recognized and consensual names for these programmes, compared to the choices they would make for an informed public (such as the visitors of a museum of modern art). This was all the more the case for the NEA at the end of the 1960s since it was then an agency with a precarious status, for which any public controversy could therefore represent a threat to its very existence. In this context, even the choice of an internationally acclaimed, seventy-year-old artist such as Calder to launch this new programme was a

risky decision, which should not be underestimated at a time when abstract art was far from being self-evident, for the general public as well as for elected officials – a fact that some retrospective historical analyses too often seem to forget.

On the other hand, American cultural policy followed a rather elitist orientation at its beginnings, very different from the undifferentiated social aid to artists that had been promoted by the Roosevelt administration in the 1930s. Far from being a national particularity, linked to the specific geopolitical interests of the United States, this elitism was characteristic of the cultural policies implemented in most Western states at that time, both in their content, with a rather exclusive focus on high culture, and in their methods, which adopted a vertical and unidirectional mode of dissemination, from state experts to a population generally considered as a passive and uneducated mass.[10] As a matter of fact, contrary to what one might expect from such a programme, the first objective of the WAPP was less to disseminate contemporary art to the general public than to "honor individual artists of great value,"[11] in the words of its designer René d'Harnoncourt. It was meant to be "a project dedicated to the distinction of individual success in the arts"[12] that would make "perfectly clear that the main interest of the council lies in quality."[13] This explains why this programme chose at its beginnings to celebrate great names belonging to old and already recognized generations of the avant-garde.

This began to change in the early 1970s. In the United States as elsewhere, the end of the 1960s was a moment of radical questioning and renewal for cultural policies and institutions, under the pressures of the social mobilizations of the time. On the one hand, in this context of politicization of the field of art, artists demanded a better recognition of the most recent and/or the most experimental art trends, as well as an increasing participation in the decision-making processes of art institutions (Bryan-Wilson, 2011). On the other hand, in visual arts as in other sectors of cultural policies, a new understanding of the democratization of art was arising: the "legitimist" orientation of the programmes set up in the 1960s, limited to a high culture exclusively chosen by state experts, had to be replaced by a more "populist" one, encouraging the participation of the target audiences or at least taking into account their actual expectations, and therefore more open to popular culture.[14] These two types of external constraints led to a gradual reorientation of the NEA and in particular of its programme for art in public places.

The WAPP under Brian O'Doherty: more experimentalism, a tenacious elitism and recurring controversies

In 1970, artist and art critic Brian O'Doherty replaced museum curator Henry Geldzahler as head of the NEA's Visual Arts Program (VAP)—Geldzahler had resigned following Nixon's election. As soon as he arrived, O'Doherty pushed for younger and riskier choices, as he reminded in 1970 to the peer panel in charge of selecting an artist for a work to be installed in Wichita: "the panel is being advised that sculptors of more adventurous cast be considered as an alternative to (Calderesque) gilt-edged securities."[15] In Lansing, where Claes Oldenburg was first considered for a public artwork, O'Doherty stated he was pleased that such a choice "[broke] out of the restricted country-club set of Nevelson, Noguchi, Calder, Rickey, etc."[16] For the city of Jackson, the first choice was that of Rockne Krebs, a 33-year-old artist designing light installations with lasers, which

delighted the director of the VAP: "This choice diversifies our program very well, it stills criticism that we haven't been adventurous or devoted any attention to the art and technology area. And Krebs, at 33, is young, at the height of his powers, and reduces the geriatric cast of our WAPP image."[17] Finally, in Minneapolis, in a project that took the form of open-air exhibitions, with works by Armajani, Le Va or Wegman, the NEA had "specifically recommended that the program should not neglect the experimental and untested young artists."[18] Therefore, while continuing to regularly commission artworks from the modernist "country club" of Nevelson, Noguchi or Rickey, the programme was increasingly giving way to the representants of the latest avant-gardes, including Minimalism, Postminimalism, Land art and Pop art to a lesser extent, such as Richard Serra (St. Louis, 1972–1983), Claes Oldenburg (Las Vegas, 1973–1980), Robert Morris (Grand Rapids, 1974) [Figure 5], James Turrell (New York, 1975–1981), Michael Heizer (Seattle, 1976–1977) [Figure 6], Carl Andre (Hartford, 1976–1977) and Roy Lichtenstein (Miami, 1977–1979).

This gradual reorientation thus fulfilled O'Doherty's ambition to better integrate the most recent and experimental art into the WAPP. But it was not as successful in meeting the other demand that weighed increasingly on cultural administrations at that time, namely the ambition of a more democratic culture, truly attentive to the tastes, expectations and participation of the target audiences. Indeed, despite the good

Figure 5. Robert Morris, *Grand Rapids Project X*, 1974, Grand Rapids (Michigan). Credit: City of Grand Rapids Archives and Records Center.

Figure 6. Michael Heizer, *Adjacent, Against, Upon*, 1976. Concrete, granite, 108 × 300 × 360 in. (274.3 × 762 × 914.4 cm). National Endowment for the Arts, Contemporary Art Council of the Seattle Art Museum, Seattle Arts Commission, Seattle City Light 1% for Art funds. Photo: Spike Mafford.

intentions displayed concerning the involvement of the population[19] and the awareness of the need to reconsider the social role of art after the mobilizations of the 1960s,[20] the examination of the functioning of this programme under O'Doherty shows lasting difficulties in adapting its objectives and methods to these new constraints and requirements. The VAP remained committed to a dated conception of the democratization of art, mostly understood as an effort to educate a lay public and to make it recognize the validity of the choices and tastes of federal experts. O'Doherty therefore balked at leaving the slightest autonomy to local sponsors who solicited him for the financing of public artworks. Framed by this limited approach to dialogue with local communities, the beginnings of the federal director of Visual Arts in this field were rather clumsy and marked by several controversies, especially since the WAPP operated during its first five years of existence in a very informal way, without a codified selection procedure.[21] Thus, O'Doherty made the mistake, for one of the first public art projects he supervised, in Wichita, to compose a panel where the experts of the NEA (all directly appointed by him)[22] were overrepresented compared to the representatives of the city. This caused a persistent mistrust of the latter towards the federal agency: they suspected O'Doherty and the NEA, not without reason, of wanting to impose their choice of artist.[23] This tension was aggravated by the mutual misunderstanding between the local notables, rather conservative politically, who had initiated the project, and the panelists from the East Coast, members of the New York's left-wing intelligentsia. As soon as they arrived, the latter distinguished themselves by explaining in the local newspaper, *The Wichita Eagle and Beacon*, that they had come "in spite of [their] disapproval of what this government is doing–its aggression abroad and at home" and despite the risk that their participation in a project "supported by the federal government […] would imply implicit support of the reactionary Nixon administration."[24] O'Doherty thus found himself in the difficult position of a compromise-maker between a politicized avant-gardism that he disapproved of and notables whose provincial taste made him despair.[25]

Besides these aesthetic, political and sociological tensions with local communities, the WAPP was also under the pressure of the National Council on the Arts, a council of distinguished private citizens chosen for their competence and success in each art field, who oversaw the NEA as a whole and had to approve every grant made by its various departments. They often expressed a more conservative approach to the missions of the agency than the programmes directors and their peer panels. O'Doherty had to respond to the concerns of the Council members, such as James Wyeth, a figurative painter with a traditional style, who described this public art programme as an "area in which local concerns came into play and sometimes caused problems in the selection of high quality artists."[26] Others regretted that "excellent art works" were sometimes placed "in poor sites" and proposed that the WAPP undertook in this case to relocate the works in more prestigious places or in museums. O'Doherty had to defend the pedagogical value of his programme in response to these criticisms. Therefore, his cultural "legitimism" must be seen as a middle ground between the more "populist" tendencies of his local sponsors, often defiant of the NEA's expertise, and the unconditional elitism of some NCA members, ready to equate the slightest involvement of the general public with a compromise on the artistic quality of the projects supported.[27]

Nevertheless, this educational ambition itself remained rather limited. While some lessons were drawn from the Wichita incident and new procedures were implemented, O'Doherty clearly manifested in his correspondence with Nancy Hanks – often marked by a sarcastic tone, far from the enthusiasm he could show about other projects – the boredom and impatience he experienced because of this public art programme, assimilated to a sacrificial mission in a barbarian land.[28] Seeking the acceptance of the public and the involvement of local sponsors was fundamentally conceived as a necessary evil[29] and an obstacle to the application of his predetermined aesthetic programme.[30] The goal was mostly to prevent the damaging effects of the allegedly bad taste of the non-specialists on these projects[31] and to avoid the emergence of a virulent opposition among the indigenous population.[32] Miwon Kwon notes that in the late 1970s, the NEA's reference to the involvement of the "community" was still based on a conception of it as "an inadequately prepared audience. The community, in other words, needed to be engaged in order to soften its members to the 'best art of our time,' to educate them in its proper interpretation and appreciation (Kwon, 2002b, p. 298)."

This explains why the tensions and controversies did not cease after the Wichita episode. In Lansing, the NEA experts tried unsuccessfully to impose the choice of Oldenburg between 1971 and 1973.[33] In Jackson, which O'Doherty described, with his usual irony, as a "visually virgin"[34] territory and a "National Sculptural Disaster",[35] he did not succeed either in imposing the choice of an avant-garde artist for a project he had hoped to be a kind of NEA outpost in a southern state. The difficulties of the WAPP also stemmed from the fact that it was designed in such a way that the sponsors who solicited it were usually sociologically homogeneous coalitions of "friends of the fine arts", composed of elected officials, civil servants and various local figures. The only exception was the "Inner City Mural" programme, established in 1971 as a detached category from the WAPP. Inspired by similar programmes initiated by some major cities across the country, it sought to promote the creation of large murals, especially in black neighbourhoods, usually by artists who came from them. However, it had a very short lifespan since it was reintegrated into the WAPP the following year. This choice was motivated by a

persistent mistrust of the quality of the works supported, which were discredited a priori in the eyes of the federal experts by their "social" character.[36]

Whether in this branch dedicated to disadvantaged neighbourhoods of large metropolis, or in projects for medium-sized cities distant from the main cultural centres, the NEA was therefore systematically reluctant to the idea of leaving a part in the choice of artists and works to local initiatives. These were considered, depending on the case, as too populist, too conservative, or too provincial.

A postmodernist art instead of a democratic culture

This explains why the VAP preferred another solution to distance itself from the elitism attached to this founding programme of the NEA, without calling into question the monopoly and legitimacy of its own expertise. The effort of democratization was made neither during the preparation of these projects, by improving the collaboration with local partners for the choice of the artworks, nor after their realization, by communicating around the works and exchanging about them with the population.[37] Instead, the ability to positively transform the relationship between contemporary art and the public was attributed to the sole aesthetic properties of a specific type of innovative works.

Indeed, as evidenced by the list of works aforementioned, the NEA chose to favour site-specific and environmental art, i.e. works that are designed specifically and exclusively for the place where they are located. This choice first responded, as we have seen, to the rejuvenated and more experimental orientation that O'Doherty wanted for the programme: this type of installations was a major trend on the avant-garde scene of the 1970s, from postminimalism to Land art. But it also stemmed from a reflection on the social role of a public art programme, since site-specific artworks are by definition based on an intrinsic association with their physical environment and social context, considered as artistic materials in their own right. They are thus opposed to the ideal type of the modernist work of art, self-sufficient, independent of its context and, therefore, easily transportable. By this very fact, they are supposed to better meet the expectations of a wider audience. On the one hand, because they are specifically connected to their emplacement, these works are likely to blend more easily into the local landscape. On the other hand, by blurring the boundary between the work and its exterior, this aesthetic aims to attenuate (or even abolish altogether) the separation between art and everyday life, which usually gives works of art (whether traditional or modernist) a sacred aura that excludes or intimidates the lay public. O'Doherty himself, like many art critics who could be described, in this sense at least, as postmodernists, explicitly linked the improvement of the reception of public art to the questioning of modernist aesthetic: "The greatest single obstacle between artist and public may not be his work, but the accumulated myths of the modernist apparatus itself […] Also, the convergence of artist and public, or, if you will, art and society, bring to bear on the work of public art esthetic and social energies that are, for those of us who see this area in positive terms, the material which must be used" (O'Doherty, 1974, p. 44).

This means, as Miwon Kwon has clearly perceived, that the transition operated by the NEA during the 1970s,[38] from the placement of large modernist sculptures in public spaces to a neo-avant-garde or postmodernist site-specific aesthetic, was motivated by criticisms against "autonomous signature-style artworks […] [which] functioned more like

extensions of the museum or gallery […] rather than truly engaging the public" (Kwon, 2002b, p. 286). Interestingly, there was a convergence between the aims of cultural administrations and the relatively autonomous evolutions followed by the artists themselves. Richard Serra's ambition, for instance, was to express a critique of "modernist works that give the illusion of being autonomous from their surroundings."[39] This was no coincidence, since most of the NEA officials– far from the usual image of the bureaucrat– came directly from the art world, starting with O'Doherty, himself an artist and an art critic close to New York's minimalist and conceptual art circles.[40] For postmodernist artists as well as public decision-makers, the critique of the autonomy of the modernist work of art made it possible to reconcile an avant-garde, unconventional and experimental orientation with the rehabilitation of a social function of art. Historically, these two objectives had been conflicting, especially in the United States, where the avant-garde had established itself, since the beginning of the Cold War, in opposition to the social or political uses of art. The repeated and vocal criticisms against the "art establishment" among experimental artists since the late 1960s also paradoxically played a role in this rapprochement between government agencies and the avant-garde art scene. By supporting them, cultural administrators seized an opportunity to serve their own objectives: distancing themselves from a "high culture" image in order to show their concern for the democratization of art.

The accuracy or effectiveness of this strategy does not matter here. Contrary to what these artists and public intermediaries, but also some postmodernist theoreticians and art historians usually claimed, it is not obvious that these site-specific, contextual artworks responded better than their modernist predecessors to the "social needs" of the population.[41] First of all, it is not certain that these installations appeared very different, to the uninformed viewer, from monumental modernist sculptures. The difference between a sculpture by Calder and an installation by Serra, while crucial for artists, art critics and theoreticians engaged in the postmodernist debates of the time, is indeed much less noticeable to a public not interested in contemporary art.

Moreover, these works can also arouse a specific and virulent opposition. This was evidenced by minimalist artist Carl Andre's *Stone Field Sculpture*, a work conceived for Hartford between 1976 and 1977, consisting of 36 rocks of varying sizes, moved on a plot of grass in the city centre and arranged in a series of uneven rows [Figure 7]. It caused a major controversy that led the artist to come and explain his work to the local population on several occasions (McCombie, 1992, pp. 171–181; Harney, 1981, pp. 76–78). This case shows that the strategies used to desacralize works of art in order to make them more accessible can lead to results contrary to the expected benefits. Far from facilitating acceptance by the general public, this deliberately poor aesthetic, using non-artistic materials and techniques, can in fact increase misunderstanding, especially since this aesthetic impoverishment does not necessarily translate into financial impoverishment: the installation of Carl Andre's 36 rocks in Hartford cost $100,000, a considerable sum whose discrepancy with the appearance of the work obviously added to the hostility of the local population (McCombie, 1992, p. 172).

Therefore, the official support for avant-garde art must rather be seen as a strategy of compromise for public intermediaries who had to arbitrate between ambitions and constraints that were difficult to reconcile. While preserving the power of selection and the aesthetic preferences of state experts rather sympathetic to avant-garde artists, the choice of this type of unconventional and contextual artworks tended towards, if not a

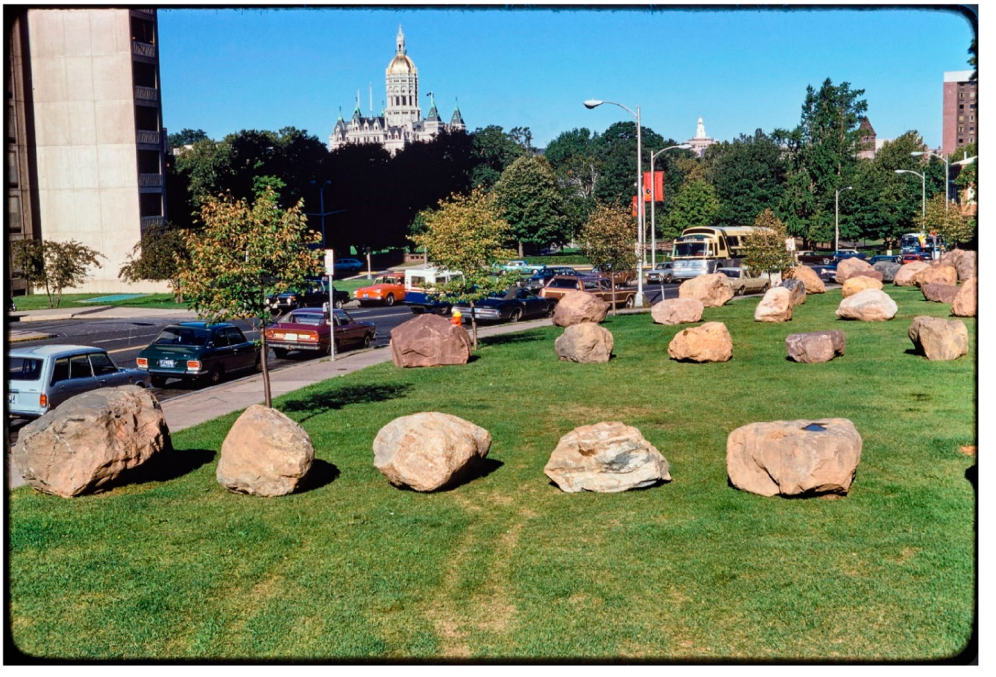

Figure 7. Carl Andre, *Stone Field Sculpture*, 1977. Sandstone, brownstone, granite, schist, gneiss, basalt, and serpentine boulders. Courtesy of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art.

real democratization of contemporary art, at least an apparent challenge to the established high culture of which modernist abstraction had become one of the symbols in the early 1960s. By favouring radical avant-garde works – and, more precisely, those neo-avant-garde trends that were then described in the United States as postmodernist[42] – and by presenting them as an active critique of a conservative elite culture, public administrations could support the avant-garde, not in spite of public hostility, but in the very name of the (theoretical) public interest and their mission of democratizing art.

In other words, this strategy consists in a third way, usually neglected, between "legitimism" and "populism", which resembles what Passeron once described as a "revolutionist" type of cultural action (2006, pp. 449–450). This loose doctrine is based on the belief in a relationship – less logical than analogical – between artistic revolution and social revolution, directly borrowed from the discourses of the avant-gardes,[43] who thus intended to resolve, in a phantasmatic or, at least, very speculative way, the antinomy inherent in their position: the contradiction between the ambition of a radical transformation of the art of their time and the rejection or marginality to which the unconventional nature of their works condemned them. For some radical avant-gardes, this contradiction could be overcome by aiming for a critical artistic innovation such that it should provoke (or actively accompany) the abolition of the socio-cultural norms and hierarchies limiting the reception of the avant-garde to a small elite of insiders. To revolutionize art is also to revolutionize society and, at the same time, to bring about a society adapted to this new art.[44]

Expurgated from this quasi-messianic horizon, as it is adopted most often by institutional actors, this strategy rather attributes to certain characteristics of avant-garde works an

instrumental value for the transformation of the relationship of art and its institutions to their social environment and audiences. These innovative works, by the sole virtue of the artistic change they bring, would be able to solve, at least partially, the difficulties posed by the autonomization of modern art, the positive result of which – the creative freedom of the artist – has been paid for by a growing gap vis-à-vis external social norms and the horizon of expectations of the general public. Reducing the mission of democratizing art to a "simple" aesthetic choice – that of the avant-garde – has many advantages for public art experts: it prevents critics from questioning the elitism of their tastes as well as their decision-making power, which were challenged at that time by "populist" approaches to cultural action, while rendering useless or, at least, secondary the costly and demanding programmes of art education that a more traditional "legitimist" strategy would require. In this sense, this type of cultural "revolutionism", adjusted to the interests of such public intermediaries, can also paradoxically serve a form of institutional conservatism – but one which has resulted, by a compensatory effect, in increasing the "avant-gardization" of public visual arts programmes. The support of a radical avant-garde – or critical postmodernist – art, framed as a critique of cultural conservatism, can indeed be pursued as a substitute for the limits and shortcomings, imposed or desired, of the democratization of these programmes and their difficulties to effectively break with an exclusive high culture.

Art and state: a change of era

These developments are therefore an indication of profound changes in the long history of the relationship between state and culture, beyond the sole case of an American public art programme. On the one hand, the unprecedented support given to avant-garde art demonstrates a completely new recognition of the autonomy of artistic producers on the part of the state, even in the programmes most likely to serve ideological demonstrations of power, such as the commissioning of public artworks. The institutionalization and dissemination of the democratic-liberal values in all sectors of cultural administration, although still partial and fragile, has indeed led to considerable gains in freedom in the various art fields.

On the other hand, it would be a mistake to understand this process as meaning that state cultural interventions have ceased to follow any purpose of their own. Political objectives that can be described as heteronomous (from the point of view of the field of art) remain, even if they are not so much part of a Machiavellian plan to instrumentalize or co-opt artistic subversion –as is sometimes said –as a response to the need for any public action to legitimize itself as a service rendered to the entire community of citizens. Support for contemporary art cannot therefore be rigorously unconditional and must always, even in a superficial and purely rhetorical manner, be justified in terms of access to the benefits of culture, real or supposed, for the majority of the population. In this sense, the very specific case that I have studied here, that of the U.S. federal "Work of Art in Public Places" programme during the 1970s, illustrates a new and crucial tension in the relations between art and the state, characteristic of liberal democracies (or at least regimes claiming to be such), and coming from two conflicting sources of legitimacy[45]: that of the field of art, which demands an unlimited recognition of its autonomy, and that of the whole community of citizens, who cannot accept the unconditional allocation of the state's means to an art whose radical freedom from established conventions tends to make it hardly accessible beyond an insider audience.

Notes

1. In Bourdieu's sense of the term. See Gisèle Sapiro (2019). See also Victoria D. Alexander (2018).
2. I will rely here mainly (in addition to more occasional references to the field theory of Bourdieu) on the conceptual framework for the sociology of culture proposed by Jean-Claude Passeron: see (2006).
3. A fair number of studies has been dedicated to the history of the National Endowment for the Arts and I will refer to several of them in the following pages. However, these studies rarely analyze the type of works and artists supported by the NEA's programmes, or they do so in a normative way, to denounce or defend their artistic value, thus taking part in the many controversies that have marked the agency's troubled history.
4. Examples of the puritan condemnation of art in the 17th century can be found in Burns and Davis (2009, pp. 9–14).
5. As an 1871 Congressional report on the arts regrets: "The prejudice excited against these pictures [of John Trumbull] had a damaging effect on American Art. It served to defeat all attempts to afford its government patronage, or even to call in the aid of American artists to decorate the Capitol." Cited by Gérard Selbach (2007).
6. See on this Gary Larson (2017).
7. These were the first four WAPP commands (*ibid.*, 252-254). I indicate in brackets the date of the commission and the date of completion of the work.
8. In the words of Giles Scott-Smith (2016).
9. Reacting to this revisionist historiography, several authors sought in the 1990s to reassess the subversive dimension of Abstract Expressionism and to give a more nuanced image of its ideological uses in Cold War America. See Erika Doss (1995), David Craven (1999), Jachec (2000).
10. For a transnational analysis on this subject, see Pierre-Michel Menger (2011).
11. Letter from René d'Harnoncourt to Roger Stevens, November 4, 1965, René d'Harnoncourt Papers in the Museum of Modern Art Archives, Series VII, File 200.
12. Ibid.
13. "Council" here refers to the National Council on the Arts (NCA), a supervisory body of the NEA (more on this below). Minutes of the NCA meeting, February 12, 1966, National Archives, National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (RG 288), National Council on the Arts, Records of Meetings, Box 1. In the following notes, the records of meetings of the NCA and the administrative files of NEA Chairperson Nancy Hanks (held in the same record group 288) are respectively abbreviated to NA-M and NA-NH, followed by the number of the box where the cited document is kept.
14. I use here the terminology of Passeron: a "legitimist" cultural strategy involves a "project of conversion to high culture", while a "populist" strategy consists in a "project of rehabilitation of popular culture" (*op. cit.*, 452-454). This is what other authors describe as the "elitist-populist debate" (Margaret Wyszomirski 1982) or as an opposition between "democratization of culture" and "cultural democracy" (Raymonde Moulin (1992, pp. 90–92)).
15. "Projects Recommended for Funding. Works of Art in Public Places", January 1970, NA-M/4.
16. Memorandum from Brian O'Doherty to Nancy Hanks, July 21, 1972, cited in McCombie, *op. cit.*, 136.
17. Memorandum from Brian O'Doherty to Nancy Hanks, November 22, 1971, cited in *ibid.*, 149.
18. "Comments by Brian O'Doherty on Minneapolis Sculpture", October 15, 1970, NA-NH/11.
19. "It has been the Endowment's concern to avoid […] the imposition of taste that subverts the dialogue between artists and community through which the role of public art in our society can be clarified. Perhaps the greatest single key to community acceptance of art works is the avoidance of the argument based on privileged understanding, i.e., 'I know more than you and therefore you should accept this.'" (Brian O'Doherty, 1974).
20. "When Nancy Hanks became chairman of the Arts Endowment in 1969, […] There was a changed public attitude, a viable public art, an art community with (after the protests of the '60s) an awakened social conscience" (*ibid.*)

21. Official guidelines were finally established in 1973 (McCombie, *op. cit.*, 73).
22. Memorandum from Brian O'Doherty to Nancy Hanks, "About Visual Arts Panels", March 24, 1970, NA-NH/11.
23. This seems to be confirmed by Brian O'Doherty's own words: "That [the WAPP] was the most difficult of all programmes. Because there you have a work of avant-garde art, placed in a community who are, shall we say, innocent of what it means. So, the way I got out of that […] I would have the local people appoint a panelist, and I would appoint two panelists of the National Endowment. The three would get together. And then I would appoint very often somebody who was drawn up from the art community to chair the meeting and the applications would be made. It worked fairly well. And they were also to prepare that audience for what's coming because they don't know." (Interview with the author, May 17, 2018).
24. Cited by McCombie, *op. cit.*, 121-122.
25. He gave a witty report of the whole story to Nancy Hanks in a memorandum: "The Wichita Story with a Footnote on St. Louis for Light Reading When in Europe", August 11, 1970, NA-NH/11.
26. Minutes of the NCA meeting, May 3-5, 1974, NA-M/12.
27. Minutes of the NCA meeting, September 3-5, 1974, NA-M/12.
28. "As I learned at parochial School in my home village, the Irish should always be happy when doing missionary work – so all's well" (Memorandum to Nancy Hanks, November 22, 1971, cited in McCombie, *op. cit.*, 150-151). O'Doherty was born in Ireland.
29. "But because it's Mississippi and because this could be a good educational experience for them if it works out, I think we should keep smiling and smiling even though it hurts. But there's nothing worse than putting the baby-bottle in the mouths of opinionated, incompetent, and unknowledgeable people" (Memorandum from Brian O'Doherty to Nancy Hanks, May 15, 1972, "Re: Jackson, Miss. Sculpture Project", The Getty Research Institute, Irving Sandler Papers, Box 52).
30. O'Doherty reaffirmed the priority given to artistic quality over the democratization of art in an interview I conducted with him: "NH: How did you see the purpose of the Visual Arts Program then? Was it […] [to] populariz[e] contemporary art? BOD: Within limits. Within the issue of quality." (May 17, 2018).
31. "One difficulty is many cities' preference for local artists whose work is sometimes not of sufficient quality." (Minutes of the NCA Meeting, May 1-4, 1975, NA-M/13).
32. "The area of public art remains one of the most problematic for successful funding. […] The emergence of a viable public art for the seventies is eroded […], not infrequently by a negative public response and by a faultless tropism for the banal. Among the values of this Arts Endowment program are its setting of standards, and its educational process." ("WAPP Fiscal 75", May 1975, NA-M/14).
33. "All the Endowment panel members ended up plugging solidly for Oldenburg. The Michigan panel tended to resist this" (Memorandum from Brian O'Doherty to Nancy Hanks, May 30, 1972 "Works of Art in Public Places Panel meeting at Lansing, Michigan, on Saturday May 27th", The Getty Research Institute, Irving Sandler Papers, Box 52).
34. Memorandum to Nancy Hanks, November 22, 1971, cited in McCombie, *op. cit.*, 150.
35. Memorandum to Nancy Hanks, "WAPP in Mississippi", June 16, 1972, The Getty Research Institute, Irving Sandler Papers, Box 52).
36. "The social imperatives which prompted Inner City wall paintings have mostly been directed to other channels, and so called 'fine' artists […] working the area are few in number. The esthetics of the wall painting genre are, in 1973, called into question by the record of performance. […] The panel recommended that the Inner City murals should: a) when of sufficient quality, be referred to the Works of Art in Public Places program […] b) when of sufficient social, educational or local interest be referred to the appropriate city or state program" ("VA Fiscal 1973, Recommended. Works of Art in Public Places", May 1973, NA-M/10).
37. In other words, two options that correspond, respectively, to a populist strategy and a legitimist one (see footnote 14).
38. Kwon dates from 1975 the first efforts to promote site-specific artworks (2002a, p. 57).

39. Cited in *ibid.*, 295.
40. Like all NEA programmes directors, he was also assisted by several peer panels, composed of artists, art critics, and curators (see Michael Brenson 2001, pp. 39–78).
41. This is how McCombie describes the new trends favoured by the WAPP in the 1970s: an "art that tends to be functional, architectonic, interactive, and responsive to social needs" (*op. cit.*, 226).
42. If postmodernism was assimilated in the United States to the end of the avant-garde, in the sense that this term had taken in formalist art criticism (most notably in Clement Greenberg's texts), Andreas Huyssen has shown on the contrary how postmodernism, at least at its beginnings in the 1960s–1970s, reconnected with the disruptive and subversive impulse of historical avant-gardes (1984); see on this subject Nicolas Heimendinger (2022).
43. Pierre-Michel Menger offers an interesting analysis of this analogy – which he calls the "syllogism" of the avant-garde – in (2001). Pierre Bourdieu also addresses the "homology" between artistic and political revolution in (2013, p. 213).
44. An influential illustration of this position can be found in Peter Bürger (1984).
45. Vestheim *op. cit.*, 536. See also Roger Blomgren (2012, November).

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A State Avant-Gardism: Alternative Spaces and Cultural Policies in the United States

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A State Avant-Gardism: Alternative Spaces and Cultural Policies in the United States

Nicolas Heimendinger

It is well known that the development of alternative spaces in the United States during the 1970s benefited from government subsidies. However, either this fact is downplayed because it seems to taint the image of radical subversion on which the prestige of these spaces is based; or it is criticized as one of the main causes of the institutionalization of the alternative scene, or even as a pernicious way to co-opt and neutralize it. In this article, I examine in more detail the programs set up to support alternative spaces by the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts. I also study the interesting case of Artists Space, an alternative space that was directly founded by the second of these two government agencies. I show that this public support, far from having betrayed the original spirit of alternative spaces, has been from their beginnings a necessary condition for their development. This implies revising or, at least, qualifying the common narratives of an institutionalization or a co-option of the alternative spaces by the "art establishment." However, this unexpected assistance from the state, traditionally rather hostile to experimental art, did result in eroding the critical and antagonistic dimension of the alternative (or avant-garde) art scene – but not in the way it is usually portrayed.

Keywords: Alternative Spaces; Cultural Policies; Contemporary Art; Artists Space; National Endowment for the Arts; New York State Council on the Arts

The idea of an unsurpassable opposition between the state and the avant-garde is deeply rooted in our common representations. This opposition is often exaggerated and oversimplified, according to a mythified vision of the fight of the avant-garde against official art, but it is not unfounded. The origin of modern art in the nineteenth century is indeed correlated to the dismantling and the delegitimization of the official structures of fine arts administration, embodied by the various national Academies across Europe.[1] Moreover, the avant-garde artists' attempts to free themselves from the artistic conventions of their time continued to face resistance and repression from state institutions throughout the twentieth century, especially, of course, in totalitarian regimes.

This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

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However, even though it is partially justified, this commonplace tends to conceal the profound change that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. This period has indeed seen Western liberal states develop an increasingly broad support for contemporary art and, more specifically, for the most innovative and least conventional artworks – in other words, for the art of the avant-gardes.[2] The case of alternative spaces is one of the most striking illustrations of this reversal in the relationship between the avant-garde and the state: these spaces have benefited from significant governmental support, even though they defined themselves in opposition to the "art establishment" (according to a widespread formula at that time) and remain today an emblem of subversive radicalism. This paradoxical alliance nourished the idea that state administrations have "co-opted" or "institutionalized" the subversion that these alternative spaces originally embodied. Based on extensive archival research,[3] the present article aims to analyze and revise this narrative, which has become a commonplace in the existing historiography.

Alternative Spaces: Neither Museums, Nor Market, Nor State

There were alternative spaces throughout the United States and Europe in the 1970s, but the formula refers in the first place to the constellation of small and often short-lived places that were multiplying at the beginning of the decade in New York, in the former manufacturing district of SoHo. Born for the most part out of studios and collective workplaces, they became independent and fairly confidential exhibition spaces that showed very experimental art and participated in particular in the emergence of postminimal and process art trends. They distinguished themselves by the place they gave to installations and performances, two new and barely codified sub-genres in the visual arts at the time; by their transdisciplinarity, as they mixed visual arts with elements of theatre, dance, or poetry; and by their predilection for ephemeral, work-in-progress, or site-specific artworks, i.e. works that are difficult to detach from their place and context of production.[4] Without going any further, we can understand through this quick description that the works shown in these spaces were not well adapted to commercial exchange or peaceful hanging on the walls of a white cube – hence their "alternative" nature: neither market nor museum material.

The multiplication of these spaces of course depends on a context of intense politicization of the art world and of American society in general in the late 1960s. Contrary to a commonplace that is too quick to identify avant-garde artists with political revolutionaries, the American art world was not particularly precocious nor was it a driving force in the development of the social and political contestations of the 1960s. It largely ignored the civil rights movement at the beginning of the decade, and it is only around 1964–1965 that the first timid signs of politicization among American artists appeared, mainly around the opposition to the Vietnam War – which was the matrix of all the mobilizations at that time, in the United States and elsewhere in the world.[5] This first motive of political engagement was then amplified by the growing participation of artists in anti-racist and feminist movements, which led to the creation of specific exhibition venues, sometimes classified as alternative spaces, such as the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1968, a museum created for and by African-American artists, or A.I.R. Gallery, a feminist cooperative gallery opened in 1972.[6]

In addition to these external causes, the art field was also shaken during this period by internal struggles that aimed at reforming art institutions. The main platform for these protests and demands was the Art Workers Coalition, a large and informal grouping many American and foreign artists and art critics participated in.[7] The Art Workers Coalition was born in January 1969 when the Greek artist Takis protested against the inclusion of one of his works, without his consent, in an exhibition organized by Pontus Hultén at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Hultén was then one of the most avant-gardist curators in the world, as shown by his pioneering action at the head of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm.[8] This remark is crucial to understand that the conflicts between artists and institutions did not then only concern aesthetic issues strictly speaking: Hultén was totally favorable to the avant-garde art of his time, even the most transgressive. These conflicts also and above all concerned a will to democratize cultural institutions, especially museums. Artists claimed to take part in the major decisions that shaped the art world and they thus questioned the power of institutional intermediaries like Hultén, in particular their power to select works and artists, and the biases, real or supposed, that affected them. This spirit, partly inspired by the distinctive claims to self-management of workers and political activists at that time,[9] permeated large parts of the art world and in particular the alternative spaces, which, initially, were almost all run by artists.

This double characteristic – solidarity with the political causes of the time and will to democratize art institutions – explains, as one can guess, that these artists were not too fond of the state and its administrations. The public visual arts programs were thus the object of the same demands for democratization and participation as the ones observed in the case of the MoMA.

This is reflected, for example, in a letter from an artist of the Art Workers Coalition, James Cuchiara, addressed to Roger Stevens, the first director of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), which was the main organ of federal cultural policy at that time (more on this below). Cuchiara explains in it that

> only Artists […] are qualified to say who has "achieved," who shows "promise," and who "needs." […]. The Henry Geld-Zahlers[10] [*sic*] from the peripheral institutions, museums, universities and galleries, should tend to their picture keeping, scholarship gallery exhibitions and what have you … and leave the driving to us. […] They might as well go to the artist's club on a crowded Friday night, open the door and throw the money in – some of it would probably stand a better chance of reaching the right people.[11]

Geldzahler's successor as head of the NEA's Visual Arts Program, Brian O'Doherty, tried to address these criticisms. In a memorandum to the new director of the NEA, Nancy Hanks, O'Doherty recounts a visit he made to a demonstration of the Art Workers Coalition in 1970. The Coalition was protesting the US pavilion of the Venice Biennale, which was under the official control of the State Department. O'Doherty explains that he spoke with an artist (Leon Berkowitz) who had just

been awarded a federal grant, not to dissuade him from participating in this demonstration, but on the contrary

> to encourage this paradox (taking the money and protesting at the same time) through the entire art world. He [Berkowitz] agreed that individual aid to artists from the Government was a beautiful and necessary thing, and would help anyway he could. This is part of a long process in which I'm trying to get the artists to except us – as a sympathetic and enlightened agency – from their attack. I am having about 50% success on this, but am gathering some moderate and powerful support (Leo Castelli for instance). *But*, at one point, […] about half the group said that they would fully accept the responsibility of destroying our and other agencies if this would help their protest.[12]

These two documents, Cuchiara's letter and O'Doherty's memorandum, illustrate the ambivalences of the relationship between these public administrations and the American avant-garde scene, between mistrust and conflict, on the one hand, and mutual interests or even solidarity, on the other. The two major public programs supporting alternative spaces emerged in this context, within the two main cultural administrations of the time, then newly created: the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA).

The Unexpected Relationship between Government Agencies and Alternative Spaces

The 1970s, a Golden Age for Cultural Policies in the US

It is well known that cultural policies in the United States were almost non-existent at the federal and states levels before the 1960s.[13] After a complex history I will not recall here,[14] it was Kennedy and especially his successor Lyndon Johnson who finally succeeded in setting up a federal policy for the arts, with the creation of the NEA in 1965. Inspired by the British Arts Council rather than the French model of a Ministry of Culture, it refused to exercise direct control over any institution and was therefore content with incentive subsidies, resulting in a much lower budget than its European counterparts.[15]

In addition to the British model, the NEA could draw on a previous experience on American soil, namely the New York State Council on the Arts, founded by Nelson Rockefeller in 1960, shortly after his election as governor of the state in 1958. Interestingly, Rockefeller, among his many roles, was also a modern art collector and the chairman of the board of the MoMA, co-founded by his mother Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. Being the Republican governor of the state of New York and the main patron of the MoMA exposed him doubly to criticism from the politicized art scene, which made him one of its favorite targets; but it did not prevent him from setting up an administration that would partly subsidize these same artists.

These two agencies quickly set up departments dedicated to the visual arts, each called "Visual Arts Program," with a slight difference: the NYSCA's was initially more oriented toward the dissemination of artworks and exhibitions, even if it meant giving

a little less attention to contemporary art at first, while the Visual Arts Program (VAP) of the NEA was conceived from the outset as a mechanism to support new art's production, in a more elitist and highly selective perspective, but also with a clear experimental orientation: the goal was to support artists at the beginning or in the middle of their careers and the first grants thus distinguished the avant-garde trends that were then predominant on the American art scene, such as minimal art and, a little later, conceptual art or new media (video, performance, etc.).[16]

These tendencies were encouraged by the system of peer panels, composed of private citizens coming from the art world, to whom decisions regarding the awarding of public grants and prizes were delegated. These panels were designed to avoid any interference by politicians or bureaucrats in the arts and to prevent the formation of an official aesthetic. They strongly interweaved the government agencies with the actors of the art world and made the former particularly responsive to the most recent artistic transformations.[17] This is one of the main factors explaining the rapprochement between public authorities and the avant-garde scene, which alternative spaces (among others) benefited from.

This is all the more the case since these ties with the art world also characterized the personality of the first two directors of the NEA's Visual Arts Program. Henry Geldzahler was first appointed to this position because he served as curator of the (newly created) Department of 20th Century Art at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. But he was an atypical museum curator in the sense that he was very close to New York artists, especially Pop artists (such as Warhol or Hockney) whom he helped launch in the early 1960s.[18] He was, explains Alanna Heiss, founder of several alternative spaces in the 1970s,

> one of the few museum people who did have a place at artist's gatherings […]. He was enormously powerful, because he lived the museum life at day, and the artist life at night. He stayed at the bars at night, and he stayed in the museum in the day – back and forth, back and forth.[19]

Brian O'Doherty succeeded him from 1969 to 1975. His name is best known today as the author of a famous book on the "White Cube,"[20] but he is a multi-faceted character. He started his professional life as a doctor in Ireland, then was a presenter of cultural programs on Boston public television, an art critic for many magazines including *The New York Times*, and himself an artist, under multiple aliases – the main one being Patrick Ireland, chosen in solidarity with the Irish struggles. From the 1960s onwards, he was closely linked to the minimal and conceptual art scene in New York, and was known as an artist in particular for his *Rope Drawings*, installations made up of ropes stretched in space.[21]

These close links with the avant-garde art scene can explain why the two agencies developed programs to support alternative spaces very early on.

The NEA's Alternative Spaces Program

At the NEA, the origin of support for alternative spaces goes back to the establishment of the "Intermediate Programs" in October 1970, shortly after O'Doherty became

head of the Visual Arts Program.[22] They took their name from the intermediate zone they intended to cover, between individual grants to artists and grants to museums, the two main areas of action of the VAP until then:

> There is a general category existing between the individual and the institution. It is being created in response to numerous requests from artists' groups, workshops, service organizations, short-term institutions, etc. In general, the aim of these activities is to facilitate the production of art, to train young artists, to provide information and advice for artists, and to discover new ways of exhibiting and finding new markets for artists' work.[23]

The goals and the field of competence of this new program were thus initially characterized by a high degree of indeterminacy, which was accepted as such:

> When the first applications began to appear at the endowment "we didn't know what any of these places were," according to O'Doherty […]. The endowment had developed an "Intermediate Program" […] that was good, according to O'Doherty, because nobody could quite pin it down and it was therefore free to evolve.[24]

From the first months of 1971, the NEA was able to award grants to structures that belong in retrospect to the earliest and most influential alternative spaces, such as the Museum of Conceptual Art in San Francisco, as well as Museum: A Project of Living Artists or the Intermediate Institute (predecessor of The Kitchen) in New York. In the following years, it subsidized the 112 Greene Street, the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, the Women's Interart Center, and so on. "The impact of this pilot [program] on the art world has been considerable," rejoiced the staff of the VAP in May 1971, who were quick to express their will to make it "a major Endowment enterprise."[25]

It was not until 1977 that the program took the name of "Alternative Spaces" (after having already been renamed "Workshop Program" in 1972). But the term "alternative" was in use within the agency since 1972 at least, according to the archives that I have been able to consult.[26] However, it seems abusive to attribute to O'Doherty the authorship of this name, as he and other authors do:[27] in 1971 already, the NYSCA was speaking of "alternative arts organizations"[28] to designate its own program for these spaces, and the term "alternative" appears more generally as a commonplace in the counterculture lexicon from the 1960s onwards.[29]

Nevertheless, it is clear that these government agencies have been instrumental in fixing and disseminating this formula in the art world. More importantly, the NEA embraced for a good part the philosophy underlying these first spaces: the program, explained its administrators in 1972, must "encourage artists to test ideas and media and to devise modes of working together."[30] It aims, as explained in another document, to support "individual artists and groups engaged in process and performance activity, technological art, artist-generated exhibitions, and cooperative ventures."[31]

O'Doherty therefore has good reasons to say that he and his department "got involved in it from the beginning, just when the spaces were starting to exist."[32] But this "happy historical accident,"[33] in his words, was not that fortuitous. O'Doherty himself created his first *Rope Drawing* in 1972 at 112 Greene Street, one of the most emblematic alternative spaces of this period.[34] Four years later, he showed an installation in "Rooms," the famous inaugural exhibition of PS1 (a new space opened by Alanna Heiss in Queens, thanks to a grant from the NEA), which was a sort of anthology of the alternative art scene of the time.[35] Heiss herself regularly sat on the peer panels in charge of the Workshops/Alternative Spaces Program,[36] as did Irving Sandler, the co-founder of Artists Space in 1973, which I will discuss later,[37] or Marcia Tucker, the future founder of the New Museum in 1977.[38] It is therefore necessary to emphasize again the crucial role played by the mechanisms of delegation of the NEA's artistic decisions to professionals coming from its various fields of intervention: they made these decisions particularly reactive to the latest evolutions in those fields, in which these professionals often participated directly. The establishment of these types of mechanisms was not itself a happy accident, limited to a few unorthodox administrations, but emerged as a necessary condition to legitimate the development of state intervention in contemporary art during this period, in the United States as in all Western liberal regimes, in contrast to countries where an authoritarian cultural policy prevailed (foremost among which were the Soviet Bloc states).[39]

This does not mean, however, that the NEA fully embraced all the aspirations of alternative spaces. Brian Wallis rightly notes the persistence, in the public presentation of these programs, of objectives and categories of evaluation that evoke a very traditional conception of the role of art institutions, which was precisely what most of the alternative spaces targeted and challenged: O'Doherty's desire

> to assist [the] unconventional art making often bore conventional baggage. He argued, for example, that through alternative spaces "the *best* local artists are brought into the national channel of recognition […]." Statements of this sort demonstrate the contradictions of NEA support for alternative spaces. Many of the goals of the NEA were precisely those originally opposed by alternative spaces: the notion of quality […], the shaping influence of the art world star system […] and the top-down dispersal of artistic credibility.[40]

One must take into account, though, that O'Doherty had to make compromises in each of his projects – at least superficially, in the manner he presented them – with various supervisory bodies and superiors, who generally followed more conservative orientations than his own. But it is undeniable that the director of the VAP did not adopt the most utopian or oppositional aspects of alternative spaces, whether their overtly political discourses[41] or even only the aspirations to a substantive reform of the art world. O'Doherty has expressed a certain mistrust, however, toward museums' trustees, whom he deemed incapable "to understand contemporary issues"[42] or toward the power of galleries over artistic careers:

> I wanted to offer artists places that could help them if they were not viable in the commercial art world. […] The gallery owners didn't like it at all because they held all the power, and what they wanted was to control everything: to control the artists, who to choose, who not to choose, who is fashionable, who is not, who is pushed, mediatized, who is not, what commissions they take … it's trading … so they did not like that there was another center of power, and that the federal government bypassed them.[43]

But he did not go so far as to criticize them directly or to fully support, through his Alternative Spaces Program, a model that could actually replace them. His perspective was from the outset to complete and relay the more traditional institutions of the art world, possibly to compete with them, but certainly not to overthrow them, as he explained in 1976: "Workshops, *kunsthalles*, alternative spaces now provide a para-museum structure that carries on some of the tasks of clarification previously undertaken by museums."[44]

The NYSCA's Alternative Spaces Program

The NYSCA, even more than the NEA, has offered sustained support to alternative spaces in New York State. The origin of this support was quite different, since it stemmed from a rather educational program – in accordance with the general orientation of the NYSCA, which was from its beginnings more attentive than its federal counterpart to the social issues of access to culture. Its program was called at first "Community Projects in the Visual Arts," a branch created in 1970, thanks to the increase in the general budget of the agency, to help in priority, as its name indicates, "community arts organizations,"[45] thus subsidizing mainly socio-educational activities.[46]

The most diverse associations dominate the first lists of recipients of these aids, from campaigns against car pollution to the construction of Buckminster Fuller-style geodesic domes in public schools. But this program was also interested, from the beginning, in what its director Trudie Grace already called the "alternative art organizations" in 1971:[47] "Community Projects" aim at "newly-formed groups working on untested ground, [who] required new criteria for evaluation" and "may differ from traditional art institutions in terms of size, structure, and atmosphere."[48] Although these initial aims remain, as in the case of the NEA, rather open and indeterminate, they include the will to reach, beyond socio-cultural associations, spaces of artistic collaboration, more experimental in their forms as in their contents.

It is only gradually, however, that this second ambition, consisting in "encouraging exhibition opportunities outside commercial galleries and museums,"[49] took precedence over the first socio-educational orientation, under the effect of both the multiplication of outside requests of that type[50] and the desire of the NYSCA to deepen its direct support to artists.[51] In 1973, the program was renamed "Visual Arts Services"[52] and more clearly showed its willingness to support these new structures, whether it was "exhibition alternatives to the commercial gallery system," "artist-run cooperatives," or "professional workshops"[53] "these 'alternative spaces'

provide exhibition and studio space for artists and offer opportunities for unconventional installations, events and performances."[54] This last remark clearly indicates that the program did not aim at undifferentiated support for professional artists. The solidarity between the financing of these new structures and the avant-garde commitment of the agency is clear, as noted in a retrospective assessment in 1978: "the rise of new ways of exhibiting art parallels a lot of new art that is being created."[55]

The chronology and motives of the development of the NYSCA's support for alternative spaces are therefore comparable to those of the NEA, except that its initial ambition was defined as "educating and encouraging an audience for the visual arts."[56] This concern was virtually absent at the federal level, where support for alternative spaces was not thought in conjunction with the issues of public dissemination of art. Another difference lies in the amount of money and efforts invested in this area, which was much greater at the NYSCA than at the NEA, contrary to what one might expect. During their first years of existence, between 1970 and 1974, the "Intermediate Programs" spent a little less than $670,000[57] and the "Community Projects in the Visual Arts" more than $2.9 million,[58] although the latter did not exclusively concern alternative spaces. Furthermore, in 1972, the NYSCA took the decision – quite unprecedented since both the NYSCA and the NEA had hitherto forbidden themselves from creating organizations *ex nihilo* – to found its own exhibition space, Artists Space. Although Artists Space was statutorily independent of the NYSCA, it was indeed a direct initiative of the New York State agency[59] and it received almost all of its funding from it before the 1980s. As a public (or at least semi-public) alternative space, Artists Space is an example par excellence of the intertwining between the rise of alternative spaces and the development of these government programs – which is why its case deserves to be examined in more detail.

Artists Space: The Case of a State Alternative Space

The creation of Artists Space was the work of two people: Trudie Grace, recruited in 1969 by the NYSCA and then director of the "Community Projects in the Visual Arts,"[60] and Irving Sandler, who had started overseeing a program of visits to artists' studios within the agency that same year. While Trudie Grace was not particularly well known at the time, Sandler was an important figure on the American art scene: he was a leading art critic who had been close to Abstract Expressionist artists in the post-war period,[61] and he continued to follow the latest trends in the 1960s and 1970s.

Grace and Sandler set up a complex arrangement by creating in November 1972 an organization, the Committee for the Visual Arts, conceived to contract assignments with the government agency for which they were already working as employees.[62] They felt that the NYSCA was not doing enough for artists[63] and held informal meetings in early 1973 with various artists linked to the New York alternative scene of the time (notably Richard Nonas)[64] in order to better understand the needs to be met. It reinforced their idea that there was a lack of exhibition spaces for a lot of artists that galleries were not able or willing to present.[65] After convincing the NYSCA director of the project's relevance,[66] Grace resigned in the summer of 1973. With the help of an initial grant of $50,000 from the agency[67] and the credibility that Sandler's

involvement gave to the project,[68] she opened the new space in SoHo in October 1973 and took its direction. Its primary goal was to exhibit artists not affiliated with commercial galleries.

The most remarkable feature of Artists Space in its early days, and one that is reflected in its name, is its will to adopt a democratic and egalitarian organization, "with the idea," as Trudie Grace explains, "that artists know better than anyone what the artistic community needs."[69] Although its two heads were a former cultural administrator and a notorious art critic, they intended to delegate a large part of their power to the artists themselves:

> We meant for artists to have major decision-making power right from the start. We decided that half our Board would be artists. We believed that this would make us different from the typical arts organizations, which are controlled by nonartist administrators and trustees. And artists would choose who was to show.[70]

This was reflected in the choice of a rather sophisticated and original procedure for selecting the artists to be shown. Two lists of artists residing in the state of New York were drawn up, one containing all the artists affiliated with a gallery or having recently presented a public exhibition (approximately 650 artists), the other comprising all known artists not affiliated with any gallery whatsoever (about 600 artists). The first of these two lists was sent to all these artists (affiliated and non-affiliated), who were invited to select from it the 10 artists they deemed best able to define Artists Space's exhibition program. Grace and Sandler then compiled the top 20 names from the 420 responses they received and asked each of them to name an artist without a gallery ("unaffiliated") that they wished to see exhibited at Artists Space the following year. The first program of the new space, in 1973–1974, included 21 solo exhibitions chosen by the 21 New York artists most recognized by their peers.[71]

It is interesting to note the close proximity of these 21 names chosen by the hundreds of artists who responded to Artists Space's request and the list of artists distinguished by the NEA's Visual Artists' Fellowship Program since its creation in 1966: the 21 New York "selectors" elected by their peers accumulate 21 fellowships and eight nominations in one of the NEA's selection panels (10 of which were made before 1974 and 21 before the end of the decade); only three of them have never been distinguished by this federal program.[72] This result seems to contradict the idea, expressed by Cuchiara and other members of the Art Workers Coalition, that the choices of the community of artists would be radically different from those of institutional intermediaries – although this is not the only possible justification for artists to control the key institutions of the art field. On the contrary, the convergence of the judgment of peers and the judgment of state experts is remarkable. It shows, incidentally, the extent to which these government agencies have aligned themselves with the autonomous preferences of the art field.

In addition to this inventive selection procedure, Artists Space defined itself as a platform of multiple services to artists rather than a mere exhibition venue. It thus

proposed many ancillary programs, ranging from the Emergency Materials Fund, which offers to cover the costs of artists' exhibitions in non-profit galleries, to an "Unaffiliated Artists File" in which curators, gallery owners, and collectors were invited to take a look at pictures deposited by artists who wished to do so.[73] As Grace explains,

> since we were supported by the Council [NYSCA], it was almost expected that we would be responsive to outside ideas. […] Due to our substantial support from the Council, we actually felt obligated to keep the place going night and day, if there was demand.[74]

This quite unusual understanding of public service was mixed with a very liberal use of the place, similar to the spirit of other alternative spaces at that time, such as the 112 Greene Street. This is how, for example, Grace left the keys one evening to a small group led by John Cage, who held a series of readings and performances before spending the night at Artists Space on makeshift mattresses.[75] In the same spirit, the choice and the hanging of the artworks in each exhibition was generally left to the will of the artists, without any interference. It is necessary, though, to take with caution the retrospective exaggerations assimilating Artists Space, sometimes with a dose of irony, to a "Marxist collective"[76] or "a refuge for egalitarianism."[77] But the great freedom left to artists seems to be confirmed by several testimonies: "their curatorial attitude was specifically laissez-faire," recalls Silvia Kolbowski.[78] Artists Space, adds Carolee Schneemann, "provided a situation where one could experiment, try things, take risks, and these risks were unprecedented. The atmosphere was raw. There was something exciting and communal in terms of a shared imaginative position."[79]

This was all the more the case since in its early days, the organization assumed to a certain degree an antagonistic position toward the art world, characteristic of the politicized fractions of the alternative scene. "We wanted to make the organization as open and clean as possible," says Grace, "because there was such an acute sense of the gallery system being locked up and controlled by critics, curators, and dealers."[80] As a matter of fact, Artists Space quickly became a place of political exchanges between artists and activists: several meetings and public debates were held there, such as a round table in February 1975 entitled "Perimeters of Protest," with Carl Andre, Hans Haacke, Linda Nochlin, Nancy Spero, and May Stevens.[81] The group Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, formed in reaction to an exhibition at the Whitney Museum celebrating the Rockefeller Collection, also met there one Sunday a month.[82] As a result, Artists Space found itself confronted with a tension that ran through the entire alternative scene at that time, but was exacerbated by the organization's mission of public service to artists: "There were two contradictory things going on. First, we were going to try to get these artists accepted in the art world. And second, there might be the possibility of creating an alternative art world, which, of course, we never succeeded in doing."[83]

This fragile combination between ambitions of self-management (or at least strong codetermination with artists), anti-establishment discourses (mixed with ill-assumed desires to integrate it), and avant-garde experimentations (beyond the traditional painting/sculpture duo) assimilates Artists Space to a typical alternative space.

However, when Helene Winer was appointed its head in 1975 in place of Trudie Grace, the first two aspects, namely the democratic organization of the space and its political inclinations, began to fade gradually, leaving only a prospective ambition. She indeed returned to a more conventional model of art exhibition space, with a single and omnipotent director-programmer-curator,[84] and she backed away from political art and activist groups of the time.[85] Opposing the big museums and the art market was not a major motivation for Winer who, after her years at Artists Space, founded in 1980 the successful commercial art gallery Metro Pictures. No doubt the changing political context played a role in this, at a time when the revolutionary impulses of the 1960s were waning and part of the art world was beginning to turn away from the sometimes exacting politicization of the previous decade. But this change of direction can also be analyzed on the background of the conflicts (open or latent) between artists and curators characteristic of the period. As I already pointed out when mentioning Takis's protests against Pontus Hultén's 1969 exhibition at the MoMA, these conflicts were not due to aesthetic disagreements – like Hultén, Winer was committed to the most innovative avant-gardes of her time – but to the ambiguities and reticence of these institutional intermediaries in their response to the artists' demands for democratization. A non-hierarchical or more participatory organization implies indeed a more relaxed relationship to the criteria of artistic quality than many art world professionals are willing to admit.[86] It also requires that these intermediaries agree to give up – or at least to share – their power of selection of artworks and artists, on which much of their professional career and legitimacy rest. From this point of view, it is much more convenient for contemporary art curators to reduce the ambitions of artistic revolution or "alternative" to the simple exhibition of unconventional artworks rather than to an effective reform of the institutional framework in which these works are exhibited. One can speak in this sense, from the end of the 1970s, of an institutionalization or a "normalization process" of Artists Space, which began to resemble a more ordinary contemporary art center and abandoned, like many alternative spaces, its initial desire to oppose the "establishment" and the art market. But the early history of this place demonstrates that government intervention is not incompatible a priori with the alternative art scene. The democratic character of the structure and the freedom left to the artists in its day-to-day functioning even reached a higher degree than in many other alternative spaces and cooperative galleries. In this particular case, the objective of public service for the benefit of artists has in fact exacerbated and strengthened the desire to make freely available the organization's means of art production, exhibition, and dissemination.

State Patronage as a Necessary Condition for the Emergence of Alternative Spaces

Artists Space thus offers an exemplary case to refute or at least nuance certain misleading commonplaces that often alter the history of alternative spaces. In the last part of this article, I propose to reconsider this historiography. Understanding the critical and utopian dimension of alternative spaces – as well as the limits they encountered – does

not require conceiving them in a radical opposition to public authorities and, more generally, as complete outsiders to the art world. On the contrary, it is by "sociologizing" them that we can really grasp their "alternative" character.

A Mythologized Historiography

From the end of the 1970s until today, these spaces have indeed given rise to numerous exhibitions and publications,[87] often marked by a nostalgic fascination and a retrospective heroization, all the more so since their history was first written by their protagonists or by engaged historians.[88] This hagiographic historiography rests on two pillars. On the one hand, it assimilates the multiple and diverse organizations designated by this formula of "alternative spaces" to a "movement" relatively homogeneous[89] in its forms and especially in its objectives, namely the challenging of the "establishment," in the art world and beyond: "By making work that was both noncommercial and not infused with the aura of museum art," explains one of these historians, "the artists involved with alternative spaces sought to prevent the transformation of their artistic production into 'a tool of ideological control and cultural legitimation'."[90] On the other hand, this historiography mythologizes the beginnings of these alternative spaces, in contrast to their supposed subsequent institutionalization and co-optation by the very establishment they once claimed to fight. In this reconstructed narrative, the NEA and NYSCA often play the role of the villains. This sometimes takes the form of rather excessive accusations, with some authors ascribing to these administrations a hidden desire for control and repression, such as Brian Wallis: "If we look closer at the history of the NEA's involvement with alternative spaces, a pattern becomes clear: from the beginning, the NEA, while nominally supporting alternative spaces, was always engaged in shaping and curtailing their activities."[91]

Other more subtle criticisms address the surreptitious transformations that certain alternative spaces, initially hostile to any form of fixed hierarchy and organization, have undergone as a result of the obligation to comply with bureaucratic rules and procedures to obtain public funds, as Julie Ault explains:

> A significant dilemma facing alternative spaces and structures is the onset of bureaucracy and hierarchy. Openness and commitment to flexibility in programming as well as in daily operations are frequently sacrificed to the demands of funding constancy, which mandate conventional, static administrative processes. Financial stability takes center stage when salaries and rent are past due. Under these conditions it's difficult to be spontaneous or debate essential questions about philosophy and purpose.[92]

This argument seems more relevant, even it applies mostly to loosely structured places, such as the 112 Greene Street. Other types of alternative spaces, such as the various cooperative galleries, were from the outset based on a more fixed organization. More generally, the relative bureaucratization of alternative spaces should not be related solely to the specific effects of public subsidies. Rather, it is the result of an inevitable process of organizational rigidification that certainly contrasts with the often

exciting indeterminacy of the early days, but which is experienced by any organization that lasts over time, regardless of the source of its funding or its hierarchical structure.[93]

Early and Crucial Government Support

Moreover, this last argument also tends to presuppose a total independence and a clear temporal succession between allegedly original alternative spaces, considered the only authentic ones, and the action of government agencies gradually interfering in their operations, until the emergence of a second or a third generation of pseudo-alternative spaces, compromised and institutionalized by this official support.[94]

However, a close historical examination of the development of this public aid shows first of all that, far from arriving after the fact and in reaction to it, the cultural administrations contributed to the initial development of these spaces. Even before the first subsidies from the NEA and the NYSCA, the multiplication of alternative spaces was made possible by an agreement reached in the 1960s with the city of New York by artists mobilized for the preservation of the old industrial and commercial buildings of SoHo, threatened with demolition, and for the facilitation of their installation in this neighborhood.[95] The NEA and NYSCA's alternative spaces programs were in place as early as 1970–1971, and many emblematic structures of this "movement" beyond Artists Space benefited from government funding in their beginnings. Alanna Heiss's Institute for Art and Urban Resources regularly received significant grants, from its founding in 1971[96] to the creation of the PS1 in 1976, financed in large part by an exceptional "challenge grant" of $150,000 from the NEA[97] (it has since become an extension of the MoMA). The 112 Greene Street, often considered the first and most authentic of these alternative spaces,[98] obtained funding from the NEA in its second year of existence.[99] The NEA's representatives, far from being afraid of the anarchic nature of its activities, declared themselves, on the contrary, "impressed with 112 Greene Street's open-ended exhibition program that allows unrepresented artists a place to show their work."[100] Two years later, in 1975, it was financed by the NYSCA to the tune of 87% of its budget,[101] well helped in this by its board of directors, composed of Henry Geldzahler, Kynaston McShine, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, and Marcia Tucker.[102] These names show, incidentally, that the worlds of alternative spaces, big museums, art market, and government administrations were already more porous than is often recalled. Feminist cooperative galleries such as A.I.R.[103] or the Women's Interart Center[104] also developed mainly thanks to public subsidies. These allowed them to set some important milestones of their early history, such as the First International Festival of Women's Films, whose organization was covered in 1972 by a $7500 grant from the NYSCA.[105] Many small avant-garde magazines, which constitute a fundamental, although sometimes neglected, element of this alternative scene, relied in good part on these subsidies, such as *Avalanche* (created in 1969),[106] *Afterimage* (1972),[107] and *Art-Rite* (1973).[108] They were mainly supported by the NYSCA, which differed in this respect from the NEA's own art criticism program, only distributed via individual grants and focused rather on more established journals, such as *Artforum*. Revealing the dependency that may exist between the most rebellious fractions of the art

world and some parts of the establishment, the NYSCA even funded a few groups of activists, such as the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee[109] (formed to protest against the under-representation of women artists at the Whitney Museum) or the Art Workers Coalition (AWC), for the creation of a community cultural center in Queens: the $17,000 grant, which AWC members considered for a time giving directly to the Black Panther Party,[110] finally went to Tom Lloyd, who opened the Store Front Museum in 1971, mainly focused on African-American art and culture.[111]

Of the 40 alternative spaces created before 1980 listed in Julie Ault's book,[112] 87.5% received at least one grant from the NYSCA or NEA between 1970 and 1985.[113] The median duration between the creation of the space and the first government grant was only one year (1.7 years on average), which confirms the early involvement of public administrations in the development of these structures.[114] This is all the more remarkable given that both the NEA and the NYSCA were traditionally reluctant to support newly formed organizations, as explained above. In 1977, an article in *ARTnews* estimated that most alternative spaces depended on these subsidies for a third to half of their budget.[115] It is difficult to verify this figure (which seems fair or even underestimated for the few cases mentioned above), but it is clear in any case that the combined investments of the NEA and the NYSCA represented a considerable windfall for structures whose budgets were generally derisory[116] and at a time when, as Sandler recalls, "you could do a show with [$500] […] [and] get a terrific studio for $30 a month."[117] This is also one of the reasons for the involvement of these government agencies which, as the NEA explained when it set up its dedicated program in 1970, can hope "by discreet and alert patronage [to] harves[t] large returns for a comparatively small investment."[118]

Institutionalization?

All these remarks do not aim at denying the existence of the very real oppositions and divergences between the alternative spaces and the dominant institutions of the art field, even less at denouncing any hidden compromises of the former with the latter. They rather intend to question the validity of two oversimplified sociological and historiographical models, too often applied to the history of alternative spaces and in particular to their relationship with public administrations, namely the model of institutionalization and that of co-option.

The first one, that of institutionalization, is often based on a simplistic conception of the notion of institution. "Institution" can be understood in a broad sense, the way Durkheim defined it, as including "all the beliefs and modes of behavior instituted by the collectivity,"[119] or in a narrower sense, as a synonym or a parent of the notion of organization. The institutionalization narrative, so frequent in the history of modern and contemporary art, is often based on a third and even narrower conception of the notion of institution, which refers not only to the idea of organization, but to that of an organization structured in a rigid and hierarchical way, exercising a more or less constraining power in its field, like big museums and leading galleries. For this reason, they are suspected of complicity with extra-artistic repressive powers or mechanisms of domination, such as the state, capitalism, and so on. It is only in this third sense that alternative spaces can be described, somewhat misleadingly, as "anti-" or

"extra-institutional"[120] and considered to have subsequently undergone a process of "institutionalization": because they adopt for the most part in their beginnings an egalitarian and/or a very informal organization, because they challenge the most established organizations and norms of the art world, and, finally, because they also intend, for a part at least, to oppose a certain social and political order. However, none of these reasons prevents them from being classified as "institutions" in the first two and more neutral senses of this term. One can certainly distinguish different degrees of "institutionality," estimate that most alternative spaces are weak or fragile institutions (as is the case for virtually all organizations in their early stages), and conclude in this framework that they have indeed experienced during the 1970s a form of institutionalization, understood as a process of stabilization, formalization, and complexification of their organization. But one cannot consider that 55 Mercer, The Kitchen, A.I.R. Gallery, the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, or even the very informal 112 Greene Street were not, from their earliest years, institutions in their own way.

In other words, the debates and conflicts that affected and structured the American art world in the 1970s, and in particular the alternative scene, did not so much oppose institutions and anti-institutions as different ways of conceiving an art organization, its size, its functioning, its purposes, the distribution of power within it and in its relations with its partners, its competitors and its opponents. This is why the main opposition between alternative spaces and "art establishment" is in fact complicated by secondary struggles and divergences, less binary, internal to the very "camp" of alternative spaces. The radical spontaneism associated with the first years of the emblematic 112 Greene Street represents only one possible tendency, next to which coexist much more organized and, in a sense, more "institutionalized" structures: cooperatives galleries, such as the feminist A.I.R. Gallery; organizations with an individual direction, comparable in this sense to a more traditional art center, such as Alanna Heiss's Institute for Art and Urban Resources; non-profit galleries based on private patronage like Holly Solomon's 98 Greene Street; or community art centers committed to the recognition of the art and culture of ethnic or national minorities, as were the Studio Museum in Harlem or El Taller Boricua.[121] These variations can even be found within a single place, as illustrated by Artists Space's transition from Trudie Grace's artists-run organization to Helene Winer's more personal direction. Their goals can also vary considerably, from the revolutionary ambitions to overthrow established art institutions to the more "reformist" desire to facilitate the entry into the art world for young artists, through all intermediate degrees: exhibiting categories of artists marginalized by most museums or by the art market (such as minority and women artists), creating free spaces for collective artistic experimentations, and so on. Conversely, the action of the NEA or the NYSCA in this area certainly cannot be described as a form of "social control" (according to Wallis's thesis), nor does it unequivocally follow a logic of bureaucratic standardization, as evidenced by the case of Artists Space once again. It takes paths and pursues goals whose diversity is poorly rendered by what its critics call "institutionalization."

The history of alternative spaces in the 1970s thus cannot be told as one of "anti-institutions" betraying themselves by gradually converting to the status of full institutions. On the contrary, one can even say that alternative spaces emerged from the

outset as the result of a process of institutionalization – a sort of self-institutionalization of the avant-garde, so to speak. Indeed, many of them were the result of attempts by various groups of artists (generally non-conventional and at the beginning of their careers) to create and control their own places in which to produce, show, and sell their work, whereas these were historically devolved to intermediaries and partners more or less well-disposed toward them (salons, biennials, galleries, museums, private collectors, etc.). Since these new structures intended to break with the art market and big museums, or at least to open a space for an emerging and unconventional art that these ignored, market monetization as well as private sponsorship appeared, depending on the cases, excluded, inaccessible, or insufficient.[122] Once exhausted, the initial investments coming from personal savings and inheritances (if they existed) could only be replaced over time by public funds. Without the prospect of such support, the vast majority of these spaces would not have exceeded a few years of existence,[123] or even would not have existed as such: they would probably have remained as informal and ephemeral places of meetings, work, and exhibitions, limited to an audience of friends and neighbors, which accompanied the entire history of the avant-gardes (and still exist today!), such as shared studios and artists' cafés.

Certainly, at the turn of the 1970s, a series of factors converged to favor the multiplication of such spaces: demographic changes, resulting in a sharp increase of the number of artists that a still small contemporary art market could not absorb;[124] socio-political changes, the great mobilizations of the late 1960s stimulating and valorizing the adoption of protesting stances and community aspirations in the art field; artistic changes finally, with the emergence of new practices challenging the traditional definition of the work of art, which were therefore hardly adjustable to the requirement of the art market or the museums. But it is the conjunction of these factors with the establishment of a dedicated government patronage from 1970 onwards that gave these changes a possible outlet in the form of alternative spaces: it allowed these structures, then still rather rare and indeterminate, to organize themselves, to multiply, and, above all, to last, until they became the historical phenomenon they are now considered to be. In this sense, the aid programs of the NEA and the NYSCA were indeed a necessary condition for the very emergence of this "alternative spaces movement."

Co-option?

If the narrative of institutionalization must therefore be nuanced at least, that of co-option is even more questionable. Indeed, to speak of co-option presupposes, in contrast to the more impersonal process of institutionalization, the existence of a hostile will at work, the will of an establishment seeking to control or discreetly neutralize a source of contestation. Such a model seems rather to express the fear, perhaps unconscious, of seeing fade away the antagonistic relationship by which the avant-garde as well as the "alternative" are defined. The equivalence that this type of discourse draws between repressive and liberal cultural policies[125] is difficult to defend and can in fact be understood as an attempt to restore the avant-garde's agonistic identity, by attributing to official institutions that were traditionally hostile but have become accommodating, the intention of an opposition now hidden. This questionable historiography rests on a perhaps unavowable regret: the

(somewhat fantasized) nostalgia for the prestige associated with the figure of the rebellious outsider, facing public hostility or even state repression[126] – a reaction to a loss of identity or purpose, in the sense that, as the director of NYSCA humorously summed up, "the reason the avant-garde prospers in New York is that it has the Establishment to be angry at"[127] – and a common simplification, namely the systematic assimilation of any cultural administration to a malicious, repressive, or conservative power. However, not only is there no trace of such an intention in the discourses and actions of the heads of the NEA or the NYSCA, but as the example of Artists Space has shown, this type of public intervention is not necessarily tied to a logic of bureaucratic control.

If the co-option narrative is thus mistaken when it ascribes to these administrations an anti-avant-garde or "counter-revolutionary" hidden intention, it is unintentionally right as to their effects: as the public support for these spaces expands, becomes widespread and visible, their claim to hold an oppositional or simply an "alternative" position is weakened, even if it is not the will of the government officials who subsidize them. This is the paradox of this state intervention: both a condition of possibility for these avant-garde organizations and a factor contributing to the erosion of the antagonism on which their avant-gardism was founded.

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Notes

1 Christophe Charle, *La Dérégulation culturelle. Essai d'histoire des cultures en Europe au XIX^e^ siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2015), 249–62.

2 I have gathered data showing this historical change in "L'Etat contre la norme. Le tournant des institutions publiques vers l'art d'avant-garde, 1959–1977 (Allemagne de l'Ouest, Etats-Unis, France)" [The State against the Norm: The Turn of Public Institutions towards Avant-Garde Art, 1959–1977 (West Germany, United States, France)] (PhD diss., Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis, 2022), 89–150.

3 Most notably on the records of the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts, respectively held at the National Archives and the New York State Archives. This research was supported by a travel grant of the Terra Foundation on American Art.

4 For more details on the art trends represented in these spaces, see Pauline Chevalier, *Une histoire des espaces alternatifs à New York de SoHo au South Bronx (1969–1985)* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2017).

5 See on this subject Matthew Israel, *Kill for Peace: American Artists against the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013).

6 Julie Ault, ed., *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 22 and 33–4.

7 Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

8 Olle Granath, "Pontus Hulten à Stockholm," *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* 141 (2017): 30–45; Anna Tellgren, ed., *Pontus Hultén and Moderna Museet. The Formative Years* (Stockholm: Moderna Museet / Koenig Books, 2017).

9 On the influence of Marxism on artists' criticisms of museums and their demands for greater control over art institutions, see Lucy Lippard, "Biting the Hand: Artists and Museums in New York since 1969," in Ault, *Alternative Art New York*, 79–115.

10 Henry Geldzahler was the first director of the NEA Visual Art Program (see below). The incorrect writing of his name may be a pun from Cuchiara: "Geld Zahler" literally means "Money Payer" in German.

11 Letter from James Cuchiara, February 13, 1969, reproduced in Art Workers Coalition, "Documents 1" (1969), Primary Information (2008), https://primaryinformation.org/product/art-workers-coalition-documents-1/ (accessed February 8, 2022). In his response, reproduced in the same publication, Roger Stevens explains that artists are already participating in NEA peer panels, that the agency has also been criticized for including too many artists on these panels, and that artists are not always in the best position to select the recipients of grants and distinctions with a sense of objectivity.

12 Brian O'Doherty, Memorandum to Nancy Hanks, June 17, 1970, National Archives, National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (RG 288), Nancy Hanks Administrative Files, Box 11, folder "Visual Arts (O'Doherty)."

13 With one exception, namely the brief experience of the Works Progress Administration set up under Roosevelt as a component of the New Deal intended for artists. But it was conceived more as a temporary artists' employment program in times of economic crisis than as a cultural policy strictly speaking. On the place of the visual arts in this program, see Jonathan Harris, *Federal Art and National Culture. The Politics of Identity in New Deal America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

14 On the relationship between the arts and the state in the US in the years before the foundation of the NEA, see Gary O. Larson, *The Reluctant Patron: The United States Government and the Arts, 1943–1965* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

15 Even in its golden age in the 1970s, the NEA only reached 0.03% of the federal budget, whereas at the same time in France, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs was receiving about 0.5% of the state's budget (pushing for 1%). In contrast, the budget of the NYSCA is closer to European standards in terms of share of public spending (around 0.25% in the 1970s). See Heimendinger, "L'Etat contre la norme," 164, 295 and 521.

16 Ibid., 138–49. For detailed data on the grants awarded by the Visual Arts Program during this period, see also Nancy Princenthal, ed., *A Creative Legacy. A History of the National Endowment for the Arts Visual Artists' Fellowship Program, 1966–1995* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001); and National Endowment for the Arts, *Annual Reports* (1965–2020), https://www.arts.gov/about/annual-reports (accessed February 8, 2022).

17 On this panel system, see Michael Brenson, *Visionaries and Outcasts: The NEA, Congress, and the Place of the Visual Artist in America* (New York: New Press, 2001). A complete list of the members of the peer panels for the Visual Artists' Fellowship Program can be found in Princenthal, *A Creative Legacy*, 134–51.

18 Catherine Dossin, *The Rise and Fall of American Art, 1940s–1980s. A Geopolitics of Western Art Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2015), 159.

19 Joachim Pissarro, David Carrier, and Gaby Collins-Fernandez, "In Conversation with Alanna Heiss," *The Brooklyn Rail* (December 2014), https://brooklynrail.org/2014/12/art/alanna-heiss (accessed July 6, 2022).

20 Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (San Francisco: Lapis Press, 1986).

21 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, ed., *Brian O'Doherty / Patrick Ireland. Word, Image and Institutional Criticism* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017).

22 The first mention of this new program that I have found in the archives of the NEA dates from October 9, 1970: see National Archives, National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (RG 288), National Council on the Arts, Records of Meetings, Box 5, Folder "Briefing Book (Oct. 9, 1970)." In the following notes, reference to the Records of Meetings of the National Council on the Arts held at the National Archives is abbreviated to NA-M.

23 "Visual Arts General FY 1971. Recommended. Intermediate Programs (Pilot Program, Allocation)," October 1970, NA-M, Box 5, Folder "Nineteenth Meeting (Oct. 30–31, 1970)."

24 Kay Larson, "Rooms with a Point of View," *ARTnews* 76, no. 8 (October 1977): 35.

25 "Visual Arts General FY 1971. Recommended. Intermediate Programs (Pilot Program)," May 1971, NA-M, Box 6, Folder "21st Meeting (May 1971)."

26 About the Institute for Art and Urban Resources of Alanna Heiss, referred to as a "para-gallery alternative" ("Visual Arts Program – FY 1973. Chairman's Actions," September 1972, NA-M, Box 9, Folder "27th Meeting").

27 O'Doherty seems to have claimed its authorship in an interview cited in Cristelle Terroni, "Les espaces alternatifs new-yorkais, nouvelles instances de légitimation artistique," *Revue de recherche en civilisation américaine* (2014), http://journals.openedition.org/rrca/615 (accessed August 11, 2021). This idea can also be found

in Larson, "Rooms with a Point of View," 36; or Brian Wallis, "Public Funding and Alternative Spaces," in Ault, *Alternative Art New York*, 171.

28 "It has become clear over the past year that many groups applying for help, despite newness or lack of institutional stature, serve as 'alternative arts organizations' in relation to museums" in NYSCA, *Annual Report* 1970–1971 (1971), 100. All the NYSCA's Annual reports from 1960 to 1999 can be found on the agency's website: https://arts.ny.gov/annual-reports (accessed March 29, 2023).

29 Chevalier, *Une histoire des espaces alternatifs*, 11.

30 "Artists' Workshops (Intermediate Program)," May 1972, NA-M, Box 8, Folder "25th Meeting."

31 "Visual Arts Program. Final Draft," NA-M, Box 7, Folder "24th Meeting (Feb. 1972)."

32 Larson, "Rooms with a Point of View," 35.

33 Ibid.

34 Lerm Hayes, *Brian O'Doherty / Patrick Ireland*, 294.

35 Alanna Heiss, ed., *Rooms* (New York: Institute for Art and Urban Resources, 1977).

36 In 1975, for example. Heiss's Institute for Art and Urban Resources that year received $15,000, the maximum grant amount ("Visual Arts Program Fiscal 1975," February 1975, NA-M, Box 13, Folder "38th Meeting").

37 Ibid.

38 In 1974 (National Endowment for the Arts, *Annual Report 1974* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1975), 105).

39 For a compared study of these complex mechanisms of delegation and intermediation in American, French, and West German public arts policies, see Heimendinger, "L'Etat contre la norme," 443–73.

40 According to Wallis, "Public Funding and Alternative Spaces," 172.

41 The confidential commentary justifying the subsidy given to the Intermediate Institute (The Kitchen), for projects including Max Neuhaus, the Pulsa Group, or Nam June Paik, reveals the VAP's mistrust toward the politicization of the art field at this time, considered to be conflicting with the agency's criteria of quality: "Intermedia Institute [*sic*] is doing the best Art and Technology work now. This is because it works with individual artists, composers, media freaks, etc., on specific projects, without forcing them to buy ideological tickets to some Utopia. The Institute is run sensibly and has its feet on the ground" ("Chairman's Actions. Short-term activities (Intermediate Program)," May 1972, NA-M, Box 8, Folder "25th Meeting").

42 Brian O'Doherty, "Introduction," in *Museums in Crisis*, ed. Brian O'Doherty (New York: George Braziller, 1972), 2.

43 Cited by Terroni, "Les espaces alternatifs new-yorkais."

44 Brian O'Doherty, "National Endowment for the Arts: The Visual Arts Program," *American Art Review* III, no. 4 (July–August 1976): 68.

45 Allon Schoener, "Visual Arts Program," in NYSCA, *Annual Report 1970–1971*, 89.

46 "The largest amount of aid went toward the costs of educational activities – classes, lectures, workshops, and exhibitions – with emphasis on quality instruction rather than recreation" (Trudie Grace, "Community Projects in the Visual Arts," in NYSCA, *Annual Report 1971–1972* (1972), 107; the following pages list all the supported projects).

47 Trudie Grace, "Community Projects in the Visual Arts," in NYSCA, *Annual Report 1970–1971* (1971), 100.

48 Ibid., 89 and 100.
49 Lucy Kostelanetz, "Visual Arts," in NYSCA, *Annual Report 1972–1973* (1973), 46.
50 "These groups [alternative spaces] present an interesting paradox in that they are fairly new and developing (often 3 to 5 years old) yet they are growing by leaps and bounds. […] The organizations exhibit enormous potential for program expansion" ("The State of Visual Arts Services," April 1978, unsigned note, New York State Archives, NYSCA, Council on the Arts Meeting Minutes, Box 10, Folder "Council Retreat April 5–6, 1978").
51 "The focus has changed from community arts projects to services and opportunities for professional visual artists" (ibid.).
52 Lucy Kostelanetz, "Visual Arts," in NYSCA, *Annual Report 1973–1974* (1974), 36.
53 NYSCA, *Annual Report 1974–1975* (1975), 66.
54 NYSCA, *Annual Report 1975–1976, 1976–1977* (1977), 80.
55 "The State of Visual Arts Services," April 1978, unsigned note, New York State Archives, NYSCA, Council on the Arts Meeting Minutes, Box 10, Folder "Council Retreat April 5–6, 1978."
56 Lucy Kostelanetz, "Visual Arts," in NYSCA, *Annual Report 1973–1974*, 36.
57 According to the NEA *Annual Reports* from 1971 to 1974. Elaine A.C. King has different figures but which result in a total of the same order of magnitude ($583,000) ("Pluralism in the Visual Arts in the United States 1965–1978: The National Endowment for the Arts, An Influential Force" (PhD diss., Evanston Northwestern University, 1986), 200).
58 According to NYSCA *Annual Reports* from 1970–1971 to 1973–1974.
59 Lucy Kostelanetz, "Visual Arts," in NYSCA, *Annual Report 1972–1973*, 46.
60 NYSCA, *Annual Report 1969–1970*, 129.
61 His most famous book on this generation had just been published then: *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Praeger, 1970).
62 "A Report on the First Ten Years of the Committee for the Visual Arts/Artists Space" (November 1982), 76–80, The Getty Research Institute, Irving Sandler Papers, Box 47, Folder "Artists Space, 1974–1989."
63 According to its deputy director, Artists Space "has been a way for NYSCA to channel money directly to artists at a lower level than was possible through them" (interview with Ragland Watkins in Claudia Gould and Valerie Smith, eds, *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space* (New York: Artists Space, 1998), 135).
64 Interview with Trudie Grace and Irving Sandler in ibid., 25.
65 "A distressing problem facing many excellent New York artists was the lack of opportunity to exhibit their work. The existing galleries were not able or willing to offer shows to the large number of artists who merited them" (Irving Sandler quoted in Nancy Princenthal, "Pluralism's Progress: A Short History of Artists Space" (undated), The Getty Research Institute, Irving Sandler Papers, Box 47, Folder "Artists Space, 1974–1989," 2).
66 "Support of Individual Artists," memorandum from Trudie Grace to Eric Larrabee dated December 14, 1972, New York State Archives, NYSCA, Executive Director's subject and correspondence files, Box 19, Folder "Visual Arts."
67 NYSCA, *Annual Report 1972–1973*, 134.
68 According to the correspondence between the two in the summer of 1973 gathered in the folder "Artists Space 1970–1980" (The Getty Research Institute, Irving Sandler Papers, Box 47).

69 Herb Tam and Lindsay Aveilhe, "Interview with Irving Sandler. Artists Space," in *Alternative Histories. New York Art Spaces 1960 to 2010*, ed. Lauren Rosati and Mary Anne Staniszewski (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press / Exit Art, 2012), 82.
70 Irving Sandler in Gould and Smith, *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space*, 21.
71 These 21 artists were: Vito Acconci, Peter Agostini, Carl Andre, Romare Bearden, Ronald Bladen, Peter Campus, Chuck Close, Dan Flavin, Nancy Graves, Michael Heizer, Donald Judd, Jane Kaufman, Sol LeWitt, Richard Nonas, Philip Pearlstein, Dorothea Rockburne, Edwin Ruscha, Lucas Samaras, Richard Serra, Jackie Winsor, and Jack Yougerman. The whole process is documented in Artists Space Archive, The Fales Library & Special Collections, Box 96, Folder 29. In the following notes, reference to this Artists Space Archive is abbreviated to FL-AS.
72 According to Princenthal, *A Creative Legacy*. And some of the artists who had not been awarded a fellowship had received other types of distinctions from the NEA, such as Michael Heizer, to whom the federal agency commissioned three works in the 1970s for its Works of Art in Public Places Program (Mary McCombie, "Art and Policy: The National Endowment for the Art's Art in Public Places Program, 1967–1980" (PhD diss., The University of Texas, 1992), 378, 392 and 432).
73 "Committee for the Visual Arts, Inc." (undated), FL-AS, Box 1, File 7.
74 Interview with Trudie Grace and Irving Sandler in Gould and Smith, *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space*, 23.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 141.
77 Princenthal, "Pluralism's Progress," 5.
78 Gould and Smith, *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space*, 123.
79 Ibid., 29.
80 Interview with Trudie Grace and Irving Sandler in ibid., 21.
81 FL-AS, Box 1, Folder 19.
82 FL-AS, Box 96, Folder 28.
83 Interview with Trudie Grace and Irving Sandler in Gould and Smith, *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space*, 24.
84 "In Helene Winer's era I think the program was much less democratic […]. She created an identity for herself and for the institution, but I don't believe it was democratic" (interview with Claudia Gould, FL-AS, Box 110, Folder 11).
85 According to the assistant director of Artists Space, "Helene was embarrassed by the bleeding-heart liberal aspect of it […]. When Helene arrived all of that ended" (Ragland Watkins cited in Gould and Smith, *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space*, 135). According to Winer herself, "there were political meetings at night [in Artists Space]. I'm afraid I wasn't very sympathetic to this other world of activity that wasn't associated with the rest of the programs scheduled by us" (interview by Matt Mullican, Cindy Sherman, and Valerie Smith with Helene Winer, FL-AS, Box 109, Folder 10).
86 "I just went ahead and did what I thought was necessary to have an effective program for exhibiting interesting new art," explains Winer, and that required her to distance herself from the "people in the art world who were involved with forming the organization around certain egalitarian principles" (interview by Matt Mullican, Cindy Sherman, and Valerie Smith with Helene Winer, FL-AS, Box 109, Folder 10).
87 Most notably: Jacki Apple, *Alternatives in Retrospect: An Historical Overview 1969–1975* (New York: The New Museum, 1981); Robyn Brentano and Mark Savitt,

eds, *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street: History, Artists, and Artworks* (New York: New York University Press, 1981); Ault, *Alternative Art New York* ; Alan Moore, "Collectivities: Protest, Counter-Culture and Political Postmodernism in New York City Artists Organizations, 1969–1985" (PhD diss., University of New York, 2000); Rosati and Staniszewski, *Alternative Histories*; Cristelle Terroni, *New York Seventies. Avant-garde et espaces alternatifs* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015); Chevalier, *Une histoire des espaces alternatifs.*

88 As Pauline Chevalier notes, "the history of alternative spaces is first and foremost a history of the alternative by its actors themselves" (*Une histoire des espaces alternatifs*, 12).

89 This is Julie Ault's perspective, *Alternative Art New York*, 3–4. Pauline Chevalier defends a more differentiated approach, against the "flattening of ruptures and differences between alternative spaces" (*Une histoire des espaces alternatifs*, 13; all translations are mine unless otherwise stated).

90 Wallis, "Public Funding and Alternative Spaces," 165–7 (the quoted passage is from Benjamin Buchloh).

91 Ibid., 164.

92 Julie Ault, quoted in Melissa Rachleff, "Do It Yourself: Histories of Alternatives," in Rosati and Staniszewski, *Alternative Histories*, 38. This argument can also be found in Brentano and Savitt, *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street*, x; and Apple, *Alternatives in Retrospect*, 5–6.

93 This process can be observed even in the rare cases of alternative spaces that did not rely on public subsidies but only on private patronage, such as the 98 Greene Street, which became an uptown commercial art gallery in the 1980s.

94 "Several spaces […] have not only survived but thrived […]. They can, however, no longer be identified, defined, or accurately referred to as alternative spaces in the spirit of what that originally meant in the early and middle 1970s" (Apple, *Alternatives in Retrospect*, 6).

95 The A.I.R. program (for "Artist In Residence") was launched in 1961 by the municipality, under pressure from artists, to legalize their studios implanted in SoHo; a definitive agreement was finally reached in 1971 with the Department of Cultural Affairs and with the support of the NYSCA (Chevalier, *Une histoire des espaces alternatifs*, 30–52 ; Ryna Appleton Segal, *The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, 1962 to 1973: A Record of Government's Involvement in the Arts* (New York: New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, 1976), 30–1).

96 In its first four years of NYSCA funding, from 1972 to 1975, the budget of the Institute of Art and Urban Resources, despite being one of the largest among alternative spaces, was supported at 44% by the New York agency, that is, about $150,000, to which should also be added the NEA grants (according to budget data found in New York State Archives, NYSCA, Grant Application Files, Box 291). In the following notes, reference to the NYSCA's Grant Application Files held at the New York State Archives is abbreviated to NYSA-G.

97 "News Release: The Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Inc., Awarded $150,000 Challenge Grant by the National Endowment for the Arts," October 10, 1978, MOMA PS1 Archives, Series VIII.C, Folder 34. The "Challenge Grants Program" was set up in 1976 by the NEA for projects requesting subsidies of an exceptional amount, on the condition that the recipient institutions could raise three times this amount in private funds. In addition to this grant, the IAUR also received

$320,000 between 1977 and 1979 from the NEA and the NYSCA (MOMA PS1 Archives, Series VIII.C, Folder 23).

98 See for example "Interview with Alanna Heiss," in Rosati and Staniszewski, *Alternative Histories*, 62.

99 $8500 in 1972, which probably covered most of its expenses that year (NEA, *Annual Report 1972* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1973), 114).

100 James Reinish, "Program Review," October 23, 1973, NYSA-G, Box 639, Folder "112 Workshop."

101 And 66% the following year (R. Wall, "Fiscal Review Sheet 1977–78," May 19, 1977, in ibid.).

102 James Reinish, "Program Review," July 8, 1975, in ibid.

103 A.I.R. Gallery received from the NYSCA two grants of $8500 in total in its first year of existence (NYSCA, *Annual Report 1972–1973*, 72 and 133).

104 The organization acquired a permanent location in 1971 thanks to a grant from the NYSCA (Ault, *Alternative Art New York*, 28). From 1970 to 1973, by sending numerous applications to NYSCA's various programs (from visual arts to theatre and dance), it obtained more than $110,000 (according to NYSCA's four annual reports over the period).

105 NYSCA, *Annual Report 1971–1972*, 24.

106 From 1972 (NYSCA, *Annual Report 1972–1973*, 75; and NYSA-G, Box 103).

107 From 1974 (NYSCA, *Annual Report 1974–1975*, 68).

108 From 1973 (NYSCA, *Annual Report 1973–1974*, 154; and NYSA-G, Box 38).

109 NYSCA *Annual Report 1972–1973*, 133.

110 Memorandum from Lucy Kostelanetz to John B. Hightower, "Alex Gross and the Arts Workers Coalition," March 16, 1970, NYSA-G, Box 38, Folder "Art Workers Coalition. Community Culture Centers." Susan E. Cahan briefly mentions this episode in *Mounting Frustration. The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 306, note 149.

111 With also, surprisingly, the discreet financial support of the Metropolitan Museum and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (letter from Allon Schoener to Thomas Hoving, April 23, 1970, NYSA-G, Box 38).

112 Ault, *Alternative Art New York*, 17–59. I do not take into account here the activist organizations without any exhibition space (such as the Art Workers Coalition) that Ault includes in her list.

113 The five structures that did not receive any grants were: Apple (created in 1969 by Billy Apple, who nevertheless received an individual grant as an artist from the NYSCA in 1973), Gain Ground (created in 1969 and dissolved the following year), 98 Greene Street (created in 1969 and operating thanks to the funds of art collector Holly Solomon), SoHo 20 (a feminist cooperative gallery created in 1973), and Gallery 345 (a "political art gallery" created in 1978, about which little information exists).

114 These data are based on the annual reports of the NEA and NYSCA cited above.

115 Larson, "Rooms with a Point of View," 35.

116 In 1973, for example, the 112 Greene Street asked the NYSCA for a grant of $4000 with a total annual budget estimated at $9220 (grant application for the year 1973–1974, in New York State Archives, NYSA-G, Box 639, Folder "112 Workshop"). For comparison, the installation of a single artwork in a public space such as Calder's *La Grande Vitesse* in 1969 in Grand Rapids cost the NEA $45,000 (McCombie, *Art and Policy*, 252).

117 Tam and Aveilhe, "Interview with Irving Sandler," 83.
118 "Intermediate Programs (Pilot Program)," NA-M, Box 5, Folder "19th Meeting (Oct. 30–31, 1970)."
119 Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 45.
120 For example in Lauren Rosati, "In Other Words: The Alternative Space as Extra-Institution," in Rosati and Staniszewski, *Alternative Histories*, 41–3.
121 To quote some of the first alternative spaces listed in Ault, *Alternative Art New York.*
122 "In order to raise money, et cetera, you need high visibility. But in order to show unaffiliated artists, you're not going to get high visibility" (interview with Irving Sandler in Gould and Smith, *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space*, 26).
123 "Gain Ground," for example, lasted only from April 1969 to June 1970, because its founder, Robert Newman, lost his exhibition space (which was his studio) and could not find sufficient funds to continue its project, at a time when the alternative spaces programs of the NEA and the NYSCA were not yet fully active (Apple, *Alternatives in Retrospect*, 18). "Apple," which lasted a bit longer (from October 1969 to May 1973), had "no outside institutional funding" and survived three and a half years thanks to personal contributions from a small group of artists close to Billy Apple, whose studio also served as the exhibition space (ibid., 22).
124 This is a hypothesis suggested by Nancy Princenthal, in a sense quite similar to the classical analysis of Cynthia and Harrison White on the factors that undermined the academic system and opened the way to modern art in the nineteenth century (*Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993)) : "Defiance of boundaries between disciplines […], as well as overt antagonism toward museums and galleries, remain staples of contemporary art. And with some distance it's easier to see they weren't really new in 1973 […]. The difference is that in 1960 the art world was small enough, and in 1988 big enough, to support such provocation. In 1973, the system's gears had begun to grind" (Princenthal, "Pluralism's Progress," 2).
125 Wallis even argues that the support of the NEA for alternative spaces had more destructive effects than conservative censorship: "One might also regard these reformist measures by the NEA bureaucracy as censorship by other means. […] Those everyday practices of social control, while less obvious than the blunt force of conservative politicians, may ultimately have exacted a far greater price from the original mission of the alternative space" ("Public Funding and Alternative Spaces," 164).
126 A paradoxical desire overtly expressed by Harald Szeemann, the most famous contemporary art curator at that time: "the ideal museum would be the one that was closed by the authorities" ("Exchange of View of a Group of Experts," *Museum* XXIV, no. 1 (1972): 6).
127 Eric Larrabee, "The Arts and Government in New York State," in NYSCA, *Annual Report 1971–1972*, 15.