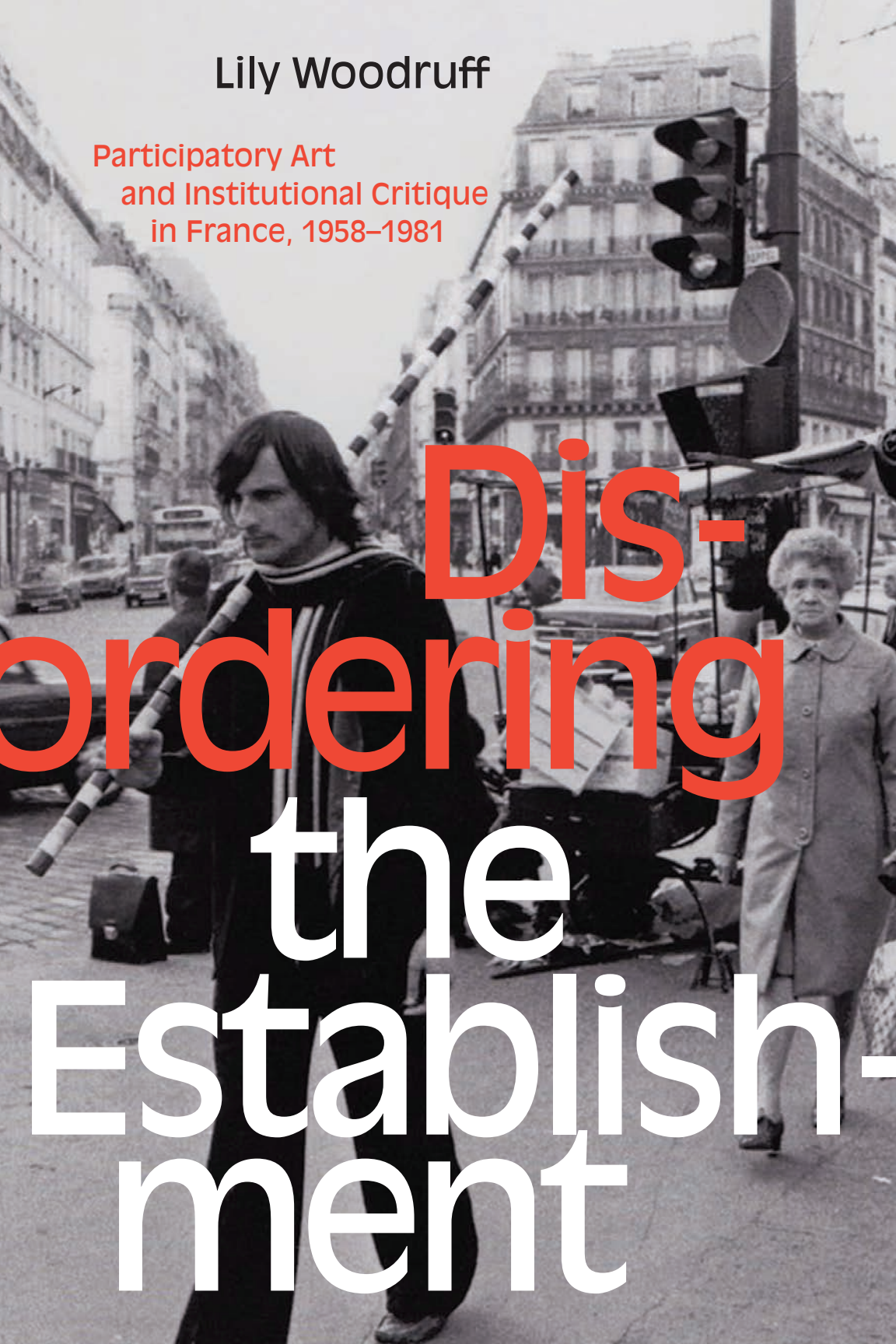




Lily Woodruff

Participatory Art
and Institutional Critique
in France, 1958–1981

Dis- ordering the Establish- ment

DISORDERING THE ESTABLISHMENT

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Duke University Press Durham and London 2020

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INTRODUCTION

On the evening of January 22, 1977, artist André Cadere hosted a talk in the Parisian apartment of self-described “art agent” Ghislain Mollet-Viéville. Cadere spent three minutes describing the construction method and the ideas that motivated him to produce art objects that he referred to as “round bars of wood.” This artwork, the ostensible cause for attendance at the event, was, however, absent. None of these bars were physically present at the talk, and Cadere did not show images. According to the artist’s own recounting, it would seem that the art objects were no more important than any number of other factors to which he called attention: the private, noninstitutional space of the apartment and its décor, the diversity of the crowd that had assembled, and the fact that those present had come due to the familiarity of Mollet-Viéville and Cadere’s names.¹

By emptying the event of its center, Cadere performed what he described as the purpose of his art, that is, “to establish disorder,” or *établir le désordre*, as the invitations read. Disorder was a theme that animated his public presentations, which included exhibiting his bars in the street and at other artists’ gallery openings. It also animated his art objects as he composed his multicolored bars according to a formal logic based on inserting errors into a rigid compositional system. Cadere’s presentation at Mollet-Viéville’s apartment manifested disorder as it provided a pretext of relative organization in which the audience would gather before he invited its members to transform “establishing disorder” from the proper title of the event into the description of an action when he abruptly ended his talk by suggesting that those present establish disorder by leaving and returning to their homes. In this way, Cadere defined disorder in terms of negativity, and invited participation by nonparticipation. At the same time, however, he transformed nonparticipation into a conscious act of negation and a form of disorder that systematically refused convention.

Disorderly situations, conspicuous absences, and institutional contestation appear repeatedly as strategies for creating participatory art in France during the 1960s and 1970s. This book, which examines such practices, takes its title from that of Cadere’s event. “Establishing disorder” is an apparently paradoxical proposition as, conventionally, the purpose of “establishing” is to create a system, a set of laws, a fund, and so on, so as to guarantee stability and

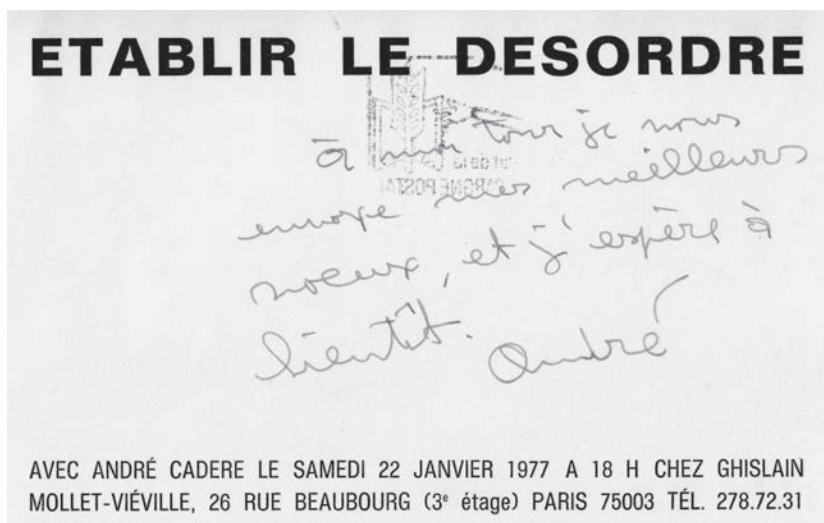


Figure I.1. André Cadere, invitation, *Établir le désordre* at Ghislain Mollet-Viéville's apartment, with a handwritten note to Bernard Marcelis, 1977. © Estate of André Cadere and Galerie Hervé Bize. Image provided by Bernard Marcelis.

order. It is the negation of what is ordered or, by the verb's Latin origin, *ordinare*, what is "ordained." Disorder, then, is the opposite of what is established. Cadere sought to create a state of perpetual uncertainty, of destroyed structures, but also of dynamism that would result from such a state of conspicuously unstructured situations. I invert Cadere's coupling so as to bring out another meaning that is contained within the concept of the original phrase. "Disordering the Establishment" calls attention to what is established at the official level. As the set of conventions that shape educational, labor, bodily, and spatial norms, and that constitute and govern arts institutions, the Establishment was critiqued by artists of the 1960s and 1970s who engaged in practices that were iconoclastic, that engaged in identity politics, and that threatened the wholeness and integrity of the body. Many of these practices continued strategies from the 1950s that used violence to shock the public out of the everyday calm that was settling over consumer society by reminding it of the brutality of recent and ongoing global and colonial wars.²

In other instances, artists challenged the presumption that museums could be places to access universal culture by constructing intimate myths of self that highlighted the ways that identity takes shape through storytelling processes informed by shared history and memory, social institutions, and constraining gender and beauty conventions.³ The habitus that sociologist

Pierre Bourdieu defined during this time as a stabilizing force of everyday social practices was coming under attack across society as students, workers, intellectuals, activists, and artists attempted to rupture traditional and institutional structures in order to create a society that recognized the subjectivity of the individual while maintaining the solidarity of the group.

The range of artistic practices during this time was diverse, in part due to a broadly shared interest in breaking away from the dominance of the expressionist painting promoted by the École de Paris. Dada, Constructivism, and Surrealism provided alternatives to expressionism, and these tendencies were, in turn, inflected by the diversity of cultural experiences that constituted the increasingly cosmopolitan city of Paris. Modes of art production, such as geometric abstraction, for example, that had previously not found large audiences among the French were given new life by artists arriving from Eastern Europe and Latin America. Many artists adapted the techniques of the avant-garde to the enormous economic growth and rise in consumerism among the middle class that characterized the period that economist Jean Fourastié called in his book of the same title the “Thirty Glorious Years.” As parallel modes of self-expression that were presumably available to the masses during this period, purchasing power and democratic engagement frequently wove together and became entangled as advanced artistic practices appropriated mass culture’s methods of facture and signification, and reproductions of these experiments began to appear in department stores. Critique and celebration existed side by side and frequently blended together as artists responded to the specificity of their own historical time period.

One of the major events of the 1960s and 1970s that engendered institutional debate was the establishment of what has become France’s most-visited museum of modern and contemporary art, the Centre Georges Pompidou. Although on the evening of Cadere’s intervention at Mollet-Viéville’s apartment he sidestepped the Establishment by hosting his event in a private residence, the specter of its authority was an absent presence that evening. As Cadere noted during his presentation, there was a concurrent event that marked this period of contemporary art in France: the new National Museum of Modern Art would be opening nine days later in the Beaubourg neighborhood just across the street from where Mollet-Viéville’s apartment was located. Even if, as Cadere attested, this coincidence was desired by neither he nor Mollet-Viéville, he noted, “I tell myself that chance does things properly, and there is, perhaps, a relationship between establishing disorder and the opening of the Beaubourg museum.” The planned disorder of Cadere’s *établir le désordre* here seemed to benefit from order fortuitously created as though by coincidence.

After taking the presidency in 1969, Georges Pompidou conceived of the new museum as a way to appease the cultural dissatisfaction voiced during the mass strikes and student protests that had taken place in May 1968. During this time, museums and art fairs became subjects of scrutiny and condemnation as artists acted against the state's efforts to mobilize an ideal vision of French culture that required censoring and, in some cases, destroying art works. During the month of May a "cultural agitation committee" set up at the Sorbonne proposed a "strike on exhibitions," a "refusal to participate in official events in France," and a "refusal to sell works of art to the State."⁴ Personnel went on strike at nearly all of the national museums, causing them to close, and the annual May Salon at the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris saw around thirty artists withdraw their works from the exhibition halls before the event came to an end. Police, in response, destroyed works of art so as to reprimand "political contestation" and "disrespect of good manners."⁵ In the years that followed, museums and art fairs continued to be subjects of scrutiny and condemnation as artists acted against the state's efforts to mobilize an ideal vision of French culture that included various degrees of censorship.⁶ In the wake of these events Pompidou repeatedly attempted to use art, and contemporary art in particular, as a way of demonstrating that the government was in line with popular cultural sentiment.

While the Centre Pompidou—as the National Museum of Modern Art was legally named after Pompidou's death in 1974—was not conceived until after 1968, it drew upon over a decade of cultural policy.⁷ When de Gaulle ascended to the presidency in 1958 it was on a promise to unify the country after years of political turmoil that had resulted from World War II. The following year, he wrote a July 24, 1959, decree that instituted the position of minister of culture, which had been designed for his former minister of information, André Malraux. As de Gaulle wrote in the decree, the mission of the minister of culture would be "to render accessible to the largest number of Frenchmen artworks that are essential to humanity, and first of all to France; to assure our cultural patrimony the vastest audience and to favor the creation of artworks and the spirit that enriches them."⁸ The objective of exposing the masses to patrimony in order to create literacy around a set of shared objects continued France's nineteenth-century project of educational democratization, while the tradition of supporting culture with state funds dated back to the seventeenth-century establishment of the academies. As Hannah Feldman has demonstrated, however, Malraux's project, which took shape in his 1951 text *Les voix du silence*, represented a historical project of colonialism that was based on excising diverse historical and cultural specificities and replacing

them with a universalized representation of humanism abstracted into photographs of objects without context.⁹ Although he had esteemed the communist party and Popular Front movements of the 1930s, his project was, as Feldman notes, not populist, but rejected the idea that there was “a people” possessing a legitimate folk culture. Instead, he sought a *musée imaginaire* that would emphasize formalism and detach artworks from the realities to which they testify so that he could reimagine French history through the needs of the government during the present moment—that is one that would whitewash the real historical violence of colonialism. This project, she shows, took place not only in his curation of artworks, but also in his urban transformation of the city of Paris itself into a museum that promoted a selective history. Beyond schools, “cultural” education under Malraux would take place in museums, including in the national museum of twentieth-century art that he envisioned. In order to effect a significant transformation of cultural practices across the country, a process of planning was necessary. Museum attendance in the early years of the new republic was low with only around 100,000 people visiting the museum of modern art in the Palais de Tokyo in 1960, and 1.5 million visiting the Louvre, as compared to the 4 million who walked through the doors of the Metropolitan Museum in New York in the same year.¹⁰ Catherine Millet notes that during this time the word “culture,” for the French, commonly connoted “heritage” and “continuity,” so the institution of the Ministry of Culture signaled that “culture was state business, and therefore *everyone’s* business.”¹¹

A series of primarily economic plans for restoration and modernization began immediately following the Second World War when the Marshall Plan began distributing millions of dollars to France, which were then transformed by the Monnet Plan into projects for infrastructure modernization projects and greater integration among European nations.¹² With the institution of the Ministry of Culture a decade later, it was decided that this work should be accompanied by cultural development. For the Fourth Plan (1962–1965), a Commission of Cultural Facilities and Artistic Patrimony was instituted, which created stability by permitting continual programming and budgets that lasted at least five years. It also integrated popular education activists, cultural professionals, and social science researchers such as Pierre Bourdieu, Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, Michel Crozier, Joffre Dumazedier, Pierre Guetta, and Pierre-Aimé Touchard into the planning process. In order to create an account of national culture, the commission began distributing questionnaires on cultural practices in order to study issues such as the public’s attitude toward art, cultural aspirations, the practices of children, the role of television, and reactions to the *maisons de la culture* that Malraux had estab-

lished across the country as a way to decentralize high culture from Paris to the provinces.¹³ These commissions revealed that an overwhelming 80 percent of the population claimed to have never been to the opera, theater, dance, or classical music concert. In 1968 the philosopher Francis Jeanson referred to this group as a “non-public,” a term that suggests a disenfranchised mass that does not share traditional bourgeois cultural values.¹⁴

It was common among those involved with cultural policy to attribute such findings to the technical and consumer-driven culture of the 1960s. As Pompidou himself claimed, “The happiness that our engineers prepare for the man of tomorrow resembles truly too much the conditions for the ideal life of domestic animals.”¹⁵ Or, as the Commission for the Fifth Plan wrote in 1966:

Accelerated urbanization of the territory uprooting collectives, the gigantism of artificial human groups as a factor of social disintegration, the isolation of rural zones, the mercantile and erroneous vulgarization of knowledge, “the increasingly abundant offering of obsessive, easy and vulgar entertainment” (Dumazedier), “the standardization of *mœurs* and forms” (André Chamson); the hostile ugliness of cramped and noisy habitat, the increased distances of work places, the inhuman rhythm of tasks to be completed, the collective conditioning by images, the separation of art as a *métier*, the commercial exploitation of places of relaxation and green spaces . . . and now the relative cultural under-development of France, does it not risk degrading the ensemble of cultural values over time?¹⁶

The commission became hostile to these so-called Thirty Glorious Years (1945–1975). In the style of Bourdieu, they differentiated between economic and cultural capital, identifying cultural stratification amid perceived economic affluence. Observing the seeming cultural impoverishment of the majority, they argued, “The era of the technical concentration of means would be that of the cultural proletarianization of the large part of society.”¹⁷ Stanislas Mangin—a former Resistance fighter, member of the State Council, and future advocate for immigrant rights—linked this inequality directly to the liberal economic system, stating that it was the “consequence of economic structures of industrial society tied to technical science, the passage from the appropriation of profit by the bourgeoisie to the appropriation of knowledge by technicians, that is to say the means drive ineluctably to perpetuate inequality in accessing culture. This passage is not the effect of chance, it is by definition the result of the natural evolution of contemporary industrial societies.”¹⁸

If technocratic ends were to blame for cultural mass illiteracy, techno-

cratic means were also those by which officials envisioned a solution to this problem. Georges Combet, president of the Institute of Industrial Aesthetics, argued that access to culture “corresponds to health, morale, the security of man and of the collectivity” and that “if we created social assurances to protect man from sickness, from accidents, we must also protect against accidents of civilization,” by providing access to culture. This comparison with social security retained the spirit of planners who placed state cultural intervention in the traditional frame of the paternalist welfare state.¹⁹ As Laurent Fleury has pointed out, the state policy necessarily instrumentalized culture. Those who formed public policies were invested in evaluating their success, which meant that the value of democratization had to be judged according to standards like costs, accessibility, and social functionality rather than according to issues related to aesthetic and political interests. “Consequently,” Fleury says, “the question of the democratization of culture is posed as a *technical question*. . . . The transformation of the political economy of culture in France runs the risk of reducing democratic aspects in the evaluation of policy choices to technical considerations about how their effects can best be measured.”²⁰ Beyond these structural contradictions, there were practical problems as well. Malraux’s new museum was beset with struggles, including the untimely death of its initial architect, Le Corbusier, in 1965; the events of May 1968, which led to the demission of Malraux himself in 1969; and a negligible budget that made it impossible to add any major contemporary works to its collection.²¹

As Fleury points out, by the 1970s, it had become broadly fashionable to condemn the 1960s project of cultural democratization as a failure due to the inability of institutions to alter the structures that appeared to determine the fates of individuals within society.²² From the beginning there was a contradiction between the idea of public interest and the idea that the significance of artworks lies in the personalized relationship that individuals form with them, that is, there was a conflict between sharing and distinction, between rights and privilege.²³ In order to combat the cultural alienation of the “non-public,” the planning commission proposed cultural development that envisioned using participation as a way for the masses to “master [their] destiny” and thereby “initiate a peaceful revolution on a scale as grand as that at the origin of the institution of obligatory public education.”²⁴ Yet Malraux and Pompidou could think only to propose projects that seemed to reinforce their own stature.²⁵ Some fundamentally questioned the very possibility that government projects *could* institute culture. As Georges Bensaïd observed in his book on 1960s planning, “that which is planned—or aims to be—is not culture, but the infrastructure of culture: cement, planks, tape recorders.”²⁶

Culture exceeds institutionalization; it is a logical fallacy to imagine that the government could make people master their own destinies.

Pompidou conceived of the Beaubourg museum as a way to assert the prestige of Paris as an international center for the arts while providing a new ethos for cultural display. In discussing his plans for constructing the museum on the Beaubourg site, he told *Le Monde*, “I am struck by the conservatism of French taste, particularly the taste of those we call the elite, scandalized by government policy in the arts over the last hundred years and that is why I am trying to react,” conceding, however, “with a mitigated effect.”²⁷ Pompidou’s own taste was unusually contemporary. With his preference for kinetic art, he famously commissioned decoration for the antechamber to the private apartments at the Élysée Palace from artist Yaacov Agam and collected works for himself and for the state from the historic and neo-avant-gardes. This art of rupture was intended to signal the new president’s break with the past. Through his promotion of moving art such as that of artists that will be examined in this book’s first chapter on the Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel (GRAV), he sought to convey the idea of a France that was itself, as Laurence Bertrand Dorléac put it, “on the move.”²⁸ Moreover, Bertrand Dorléac points out that doing so through art allowed Pompidou “to distinguish himself and in the most ostentatious way, through decoration,” an observation that is instructive for understanding the decorative aspects of Daniel Buren’s work, as I do in the second chapter.²⁹ Pompidou’s museum presented a new strategy for cultural democratization based on the recentness of the works it would display, and the Bauhaus-inspired commitment to a multiplicity of disciplines, including cinema and music.

Most importantly, plans for the museum sought to erode alienating bourgeois rituals in which the art world had been nestled. The building was open into the night rather than only during “bankers’ hours,” when working people would not be able to visit; many exhibition spaces were free; and the administration devised a “correspondents program” to help draw people into the museum through community liaisons.³⁰ Furthermore, the vividly polychromatic service pipes and exposed scaffolding were designed to attract the curiosity of the public. According to its architects, Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano, the building’s success would depend on its ability to function as a venue for the spectacular presentation of the variety of street and private life that animated the city. “The centre,” they wrote, “will act as a container” for the “goodies” of “both objective and subjective participatory activities both old and new.”³¹ The architects imagined that the building would undermine the barriers of the walls that contained it, as it “organized” “walking, meandering, love-

making, contacting, watching, playing, sleeping, passing, studying, skating, eating, shopping, swimming, summerland in winter and winterland in summer.”³² The architects suggested that the structure’s flexibility would allow it “the possibility of interaction outside the confines of institutional limits.”³³ The resulting museum drew massive numbers of visitors that far exceeded expectations. For Fleury, this is a sign that Pompidou’s project of democratizing culture was a success. Furthermore, he takes this as evidence that Bourdieu’s structuralist sociology was excessively constraining in its argument that the acculturation that occurs at the family level determines an individual’s position in society later in life. Like progressives of the 1960s and 1970s, Fleury wants to believe in the possibility of social change, yet he takes the conservative position of trusting in the power of planning and state institutions to achieve this goal while accepting a definition of culture that privileges those institutions. In contrast, embracing an anti-elitist, anticonsumerist understanding of “culture” was key to the debates around institutional power and to the way that artists articulated their critiques of those institutions during the 1960s and 1970s.

Years before it opened, many associated the new museum with the appropriation of art as propaganda for the expression of state power. As much as the museum sought to be open to the public, critics of the time noted that the museum would also provide a way to regroup and control already-ubiquitous cultural manifestations, while transforming them into opportunities for commercial gain. The museum fell under attack since it was seen as a technocratic effort to modernize the city without regard for the historical and cultural significance of the neighborhood. Cognizant of Malraux’s fated museum, Pompidou argued that he chose the plateau Beaubourg “because it was the only immediately available space and I wanted to go quickly, sure that if I waited, nothing would ever get done.”³⁴ Yet, to say that the space was available is not to say that it was empty. Rather, construction of the new building accompanied the much-lamented destruction of the neighboring Les Halles markets and residential housing of the lower classes and elderly. Victor Baltard’s iconic nineteenth-century glass and cast-iron architecture was torn down in 1969 after years of battles, and with it went an extensive community of vendors, restaurateurs, prostitutes, street sweepers, and others that radiated out to form the Beaubourg neighborhood.³⁵ For *Chroniques de l’art vivant* editor Jean Clair, the destruction of Les Halles and the Beaubourg neighborhood asphyxiated and ransacked popular culture to replace it with “a universal, abstract, international culture transcending life—like capitalist multinational societies.” “Baubourg,” he went so far as to say, would be “the final,” on “a

micro-cultural genocide.”³⁶ The museum was, then, a negative, commodified model for the establishment of what was otherwise the unordered spontaneity of everyday life.

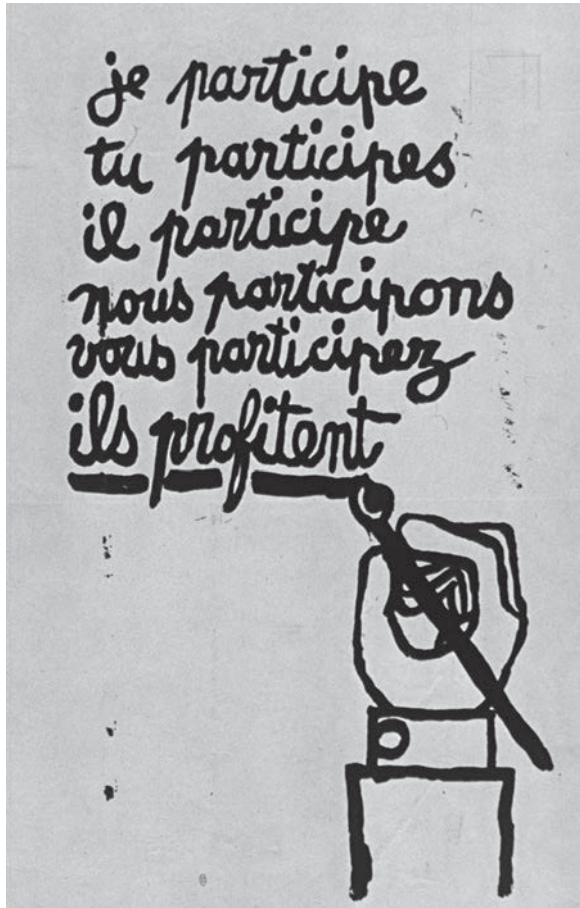
At the same time, the new national museum provided an example of post-World War II state strategies to yoke popular participation to social pacification and economic growth. Since Liberation, General Charles de Gaulle had attempted to exploit the concept of participation as a strategy for creating greater social order. As leader of the Rassemblement du Peuple Français party that he founded in the mid-1940s, he proposed popular “participation” as a strategy for healing the political and cultural divisions created by wartime occupation. By de Gaulle’s conception, however, what was at issue was less a matter of political representation and demands than a strategy for centralizing the government and modernizing the country as a whole. Participation here meant incorporating the worker into the process of industrial production so as to provide a way to ensure the dignity of man against the dehumanizing effect of what he referred to as “abusive capitalism” and “crushing communism.”³⁷ Yet while unions sought basic rights for workers, de Gaulle’s national unity was to be handed down from management to the workers as part of a business model that would replace class struggle and politics with worker access to information and profit-sharing.³⁸ His vision for empowering the worker was instead to create an alliance with management in which both would share the fruits of modern industry. In August 1967, de Gaulle signed an ordinance on “the participation of salaried workers in the expansion of enterprise” that sought to change the conditions of man “caught in the gears of a mechanical society”—a society that, as a result of policies adopted during de Gaulle’s term as the first president of the Fifth Republic, had become increasingly run by technocrats.

As Louis Chevalier wrote in *The Assassination of Paris* (1977)—a book whose first-edition cover featured the construction site of the Centre Pompidou—technocrats were responsible for replacing living Paris with its historical-nostalgic simulacrum in the postwar era. In this transformation, the technocrats “signif[ied] an epoch.” “In some future hand-book,” he predicted, “in some dissertation yet to be written, they will doubtless speak of the century of the technocrats as one speaks of the century of the philosophes, but without adding that it too was an enlightened age and probably without saying that it lasted a hundred years.” The technocrat in fact plays a minor, although considerable, role in this very book, which started as a dissertation. The technocrat is a cultural phenomenon whose positivist rationality and mechanical efficiency inspired artists of the generation to create what I refer to as

a “technocratic aesthetic.” The schematic visual output of Op and kinetic artists like those in the GRAV resembled the geometric designs of corporate logos, while their rationalized, multiplied, and homogenized processes of production positioned the artist as an anonymous suit in a think-tank-like working group. Even as a negative example, the technocrat was present for others who responded with artworks that specifically reacted against “these men of ideas,” who, as Chevalier put it, “simplify, scrutinize, reveal the universe and form perfect proofs,” because projects where “all was foreseen must succeed.”³⁹ These artists based their output in the real practices of everyday life to complicate through their scrutiny, highlight the exceptions to proofs, and refute rigidly structured models for organizing society, yet as is often unappreciated, they did so with the goal of destabilizing the efficiency of both the viewer’s visual apprehension of the world and art institutions’ primacy as sites for the display of art.

Less than a year after de Gaulle instituted participation as national policy, dissatisfaction with his model exploded as mass strikes and student protests swept the country. Artists and students of the fine arts academies in Paris and Lyon produced numerous posters, with the Atelier Populaire denouncing “participation” specifically. An oft-reproduced example features a hand neatly writing out a grammar exercise, practicing the conjugation of the verb *participer*: “*je participe, tu participes, il participe, nous participons, vous participez,*” while “*ils profitent.*” The educational theme of this poster develops more fully in another that shows a giant bureaucrat crushing university and factory underfoot while the caption declares “the university is the lab bench of participation.” While the rhetoric of participation was geared toward the workers, the protesters of May demanded university reform based, in part, on the observation that university education was designed to mold students to become cogs in a capitalist machine. Grimmer renderings explicitly linked participation to suicide, illustrating their messages with an image of a noose, or at the Atelier des Beaux-Arts in Lyon, with a skeleton in a guillotine, its bony hand reaching up to release the blade that would snap its own skull from its neck. Just a month later, in an attempt to propitiate the left, de Gaulle responded to the May Movement by attempting to sympathize with what he perceived to be the protesters’ grievances. With a Dadaist flair adapted for the postwar technocratic era, de Gaulle announced that “the machine is the absolute mistress” that pushes society “at an accelerated rhythm to extraordinary transformations,” while suspending above its head the permanent “possibility of nuclear annihilation.”⁴⁰ Rather than acknowledging that workers were being left out of the process of modernization as their income fell further behind that of

Figure I.2. Atelier Populaire, of the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris, *Je participe, tu participes, il participe, nous participons, vous participez, ils profitent*, May 1968. Serigraph poster 26 × 19½ in. (66 × 50 cm). Public domain. Image provided by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.



the managerial class, de Gaulle placed blame for the current lack of participation on the labor unions, which, he argued, were resistant to reforms he had proposed in the form of the Association Capital-Travail—a move that was to require businesses to establish work committees, but was perceived by many as progressive dressing on a fiscally conservative government.⁴¹ De Gaulle's claim that the workers were unwilling to participate in the positive transformation of the country was a delirious misdiagnosis of the problem, considering that nine million workers had joined with student protesters to participate in mass strikes the month before.

As historians Martin Harrison and Philip M. Williams argue in their study *Politics and Society in de Gaulle's Republic*, de Gaulle's own mode of encouraging "participation" in the months after 1968 fell back on the very techno-

cratic methods that had trapped the modern worker. De Gaulle consulted local groups and notables in such a way that resembled a public relations exercise designed to generate statistics that could be manipulated to provide proof of public support.⁴² In a statement from June 1968, he further qualified his anemic concept of participation by noting that “many may discuss, but only one can decide.” Detractors saw his vision of participation as a substitute for politics. They understood it to be based not on agonistic democratic processes, but a form of unity consistent with the already-existing bureaucracy that was designed to protect him from candid engagement with the world beyond his paternalist “republican monarchy.”⁴³ Agreeing finally that May ’68 was very important, de Gaulle poached its conviction, claiming that his own mode of participation was “a revolution.”⁴⁴ His vision of social transformation, however, fell short of the ambitions imagined by a majority of the public, and in April 1969, workers again, along with a majority of the general population, voted against a constitutional reform whose failure caused de Gaulle to leave office. He was then replaced by the more moderate Jacques Chaban-Delmas, whose New Society also incorporated “participation” as one of its core strategies for ensuring that all members of society would participate in the modernization of the country.

For those who participated in the May Movement on the side of the protesters, de Gaulle’s discussion of machine modernism was apt, yet it was not the technological transformations that they criticized, but the foundational conception of the society that went into producing these advances. In a tract distributed in March 1968 titled “Why Sociologists?,” a group of students pointed to technocratic modes of analysis as being inherently incapable of properly diagnosing social problems.⁴⁵ Many prominent sociologists and philosophers alike complained during the postwar period that, with its adoption of positivist methodologies from the United States, sociology had lost its philosophical integrity to become a form of social engineering, while Marxists of the period argued that the social sciences were too bourgeois. Technocratic sociologists developed strategies to adapt the worker to the machine and increase productivity, yet they lost sight of the social consequences of the advertising, politics, housing, and so forth that they created. “In France,” the students argued, “the rationalization of capitalism was ushered in with the advent of the postwar plans, but did not become a serious business until the rise of Gaullism with its authoritarian structures”—as they noted, it was not until 1958 that sociology degrees were introduced to the universities.⁴⁶ Rather than attending to juvenile delinquency, racism, or slums, the authors accused sociologists of serving the bourgeoisie and the state that employed them by maintaining order with

an eye to more efficiently producing the consumer goods needed for a modernization dependent on the unfettered expansion of capital.

The rationalized models of structuralism, sociology, information science, and their applications in technocracy, as well as the specious participation promoted by the state, factor historically and theoretically in the art practices that this book examines. Artists deployed the sociological methods of the questionnaire, the opinion poll, and statistical quantification of populations as tools that allowed them to draw their audiences into the production of artworks through direct interrogation. In some instances, their questions reflected back on the audience's views on art, while in others, audiences were implicitly asked to analyze their aesthetic preferences in terms of their social and cultural milieus. They structurally isolated the roles of artist, audience, gallery, and street in order to understand arts institutions as ideological apparatuses and position themselves, and their audiences, in self-aware counterpoint to them.

The expression "institutional critique" first appeared in Art & Language artist Mel Ramsden's 1975 essay "On Practice" to refer not just to art, but to a broader system of critical understanding that emphasizes a materialist and historical correction to the seemingly natural and idealist operations of museums, galleries, critics, and markets.⁴⁷ He argued, however, that critiquing institutions could become empty sloganizing that would reproduce the narcissism and spectacle that he identified with artists like Joseph Beuys and Jean Toche if the critique were not tied to specific institutional problems. Indeed, this was a distinction that Hal Foster later pointed to in seeking to rescue "neo-avant-garde" artists like Buren, Marcel Broodthaers, and Hans Haacke from Peter Bürger's accusation that this younger generation presented a derivative institutionalization of its radical ancestors.⁴⁸ Art of the 1960s continued historical avant-garde practices reaching back to the spatially contextualized poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé; the institutional provocations and curatorial gestures of Marcel Duchamp; and critiques of authorship as they took shape variously through the use of collage, monochrome painting, and constructivist attention to industrial processes and erasures of gesture. Rejecting Bürger's bias (and insisting on the type of materialist specificity for which Ramsden called), Foster argued that the critiques the historical avant-garde artists offered were themselves limited as they reinforced aesthetic autonomy, but that they provided lessons for artists of the 1960s who developed them into a "crit-

ical consciousness of history” by deconstructing the institutional contingencies that conditioned them.

Benjamin Buchloh historically situates the conceptual aesthetics of 1960s institutional critique in the post-World War II economic boom during which a bureaucratic class expanded and the labor struggles that had motivated the historical avant-gardes were displaced by what Buchloh calls the “aesthetic of administration.”⁴⁹ Rather than production, this new art took its cues from management, and its aesthetic was based on the repetitive rhetorical form of tautology. Pointing to 1960s France as a privileged site of critical output on this subject, he cites both Roland Barthes and Guy Debord as particularly articulate commentators on the pernicious way that tautology erodes political awareness in everyday life, replacing it with “a dead, a motionless world” of spectacle in which “like produces like” and there is no distinction between means and their ends.⁵⁰ For Buchloh, this took shape in the work of artists like Buren, who formally pointed back to the institutions that showed his work as a way of highlighting the administrative structures and ideological power that subtend artistic display. Buchloh argued that in miming the logic of Theodor Adorno’s “totally administered world,” such artwork advanced the Enlightenment project to eliminate hierarchy and mystified experience, but that it was perhaps the last critical gesture possible within the separate sphere of artistic production.⁵¹

In fact, institutional critique emerged not only from the technocratic world of administration, but also from an era in which the ideology critique of philosophers including Louis Althusser and Henri Lefebvre informed major social transformations of the 1960s and 1970s. As Rosalyn Deutsche points out in her 1996 analysis on art and the spatial politics of urbanism, socially and politically conscious actors have been keen to demonstrate that arts institutions are not aesthetically neutral spaces, but ones that privileged artists resembling the ones that make up Buchloh’s genealogy. Feminist artists, artists of color, and queer artists, among others, have critiqued arts institutions by refusing the idea of the artistic sphere as separate. The most important artworks, Deutsche argues, produce “critical images” that insist on the co-constitutive relationality between artworks and viewers, such that the latter recognize their responsibilities in producing the image world.⁵² In the same period, Foster observes in his essay “The Artist as Ethnographer” that institutionally critical art that has adopted the community-based or discourse-specific subject matter typical of the social sciences must maintain a critical distance between the viewer and the artwork so as not to disregard the othering that produces social difference and marginalization in the first place.⁵³ Negotiating experiences of

phenomenal and structural immanence on one hand, and maintaining a distance that consequently fails to meaningfully influence the viewer-participant on the other, becomes a challenge central to the aesthetically and socially ambitious artworks this book investigates.

This book begins a few years before most narratives of institutional critique to consider how its strategies and goals have been relevant to an aesthetic diversity that ranges from optically rich kinetic art to the austerity of conceptualism and the miscellany of community-based practice. Despite the diversity of these approaches, the administered world figures in each instance as a source of mimesis and resistance. The selection of artists presented here proposes a sort of epistemological relay across a little over two decades in which the critique of institutions evolved in relation to techniques of governance and cultural pushback. Around the same time as the election of de Gaulle, members of what would become the GRAV began adopting the techniques and aesthetics of technocracy by transforming slick new materials, serial forms, and statistical techniques from which new cities and gadgets were being constructed, transforming them into rationalized compositions of Op and kinetic art. Simultaneously, the artists destabilized these forms so as to sharpen the perception of a sleeping populace, and they distributed questionnaires designed to make viewer-participants doubt their presumptions regarding the social impact art should have. Buren's critique of institutions was dramatically more pointed and less accessible to a general audience than was that of the GRAV. Appropriating the ubiquitous stripe motif of café awnings, he produced installations that used the lowbrow strategies of decorative ornamentation to highlight the liminal physical spaces of museums and galleries, and to escape from these spaces out into the streets. In so doing, it negotiated power and boundaries, pushing museums and galleries to accommodate forms of art and display that challenged their autonomy. Cadere antagonized the art world by attending other artists' exhibition openings with his own large and brightly colored artworks in hand, thereby appropriating readymade institutional rituals. His post-1968 attacks on galleries and museums are at once the most nostalgic for the bourgeois promises of individual freedom and the institutions that celebrated it, and the least charmed by "the proletarian off shoot" of radical leftist politics, which, as an émigré from communist Romania, he was disinclined to embrace. His strategy pivoted on his personal charisma, yet it did so as a challenge to the premise that institutions operated on subjective logics that allowed for exclusive insularity.

The clearest break from the institution offered by artists who grew out of institutional critique comes from the Collectif d'Art Sociologique (CAS),

which rejected traditional artistic processes, turning instead to one of the most influential and controversial disciplines of the time to make work based on interactions with the general public in the spaces of their everyday lives. Even as he understood it to be naïve, what Ramsden ultimately sought during the same period was not an art of institutional critique, but an “authentic” community practice that would do more than “just embody a commodity mode of existence.”⁵⁴ The work of the CAS built on the leftist academic and activist discourses of the 1960s in search of just such an authenticity. Their multimedia work understood community in terms that resonated with the postmodern networks that Jean-François Lyotard described in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Even as France’s technocratic government adapted to the late capitalist global economy, Lyotard characterized it as maintaining faith in the modernist grand narrative that society could be unified, even if it had to be engineered. The CAS, in contrast, highlighted contingencies of community building and community fracture often without producing anything that would resemble a commodifiable artwork, or commodified experience, for the viewer-participant.

Sociology and technocracy were tools of right-leaning politics and explicitly came under attack in the 1960s, yet the more or less explicitly leftist artists that this book examines responded with curiosity and cunning to the disciplines and government practices that defined the era in which they lived. While politics figured in the artists’ works, however, their vision of participation was antithetical to that of the government as their purposes were oriented more toward doubt, reflecting on processes of interrogation, and pointing to the excesses and suppressions of the “mistress machine,” rather than priming the public for its own submission. The degree of critical self-reflection on the rhetoric of the methods they deployed differed from one instance to the next, yet in each case the artists appropriated their methodologies in order to undermine the order that they were otherwise used to establish. Community interaction in public spaces around objects that artists produced in multiples undercut the space of the museum, the art market, and the concept of artistic originality from which the art establishment derived its power and authority. By devoting themselves to the social context in which art takes place, the artists continued the work that the agitators of 1968 complained sociologists were failing to perform. The artists sought to work across divisions between the individual and society, between segregated communities, and to create opportunities for art to become sutured into everyday life.

One of the strategies by which both the government and artists fostered participation was through processes of decentralization that replaced author-

itarian dictate with collaboration. In a similar vein to his participation proposal, which resulted in the greater concentration of wealth among the few, so again de Gaulle put forward a form of governmental “decentralization” in order to stabilize his own power. He attempted to transform an already-existing program of democratic decentralization into a technocratic deconcentration that would restructure the political landscape for economic revival among the socioprofessional class. Politically distinct local governments that had enjoyed relative sovereignty (and that were largely run by anti-Gaullist officials) found themselves under the jurisdiction of new regional governments that de Gaulle established in order to create intermediate control between national and local levels. As he hoped, these regional administrative units would function as economic think tanks dominated by technocrats.⁵⁵ This promotion of government interests by decentralization was paralleled in the art-world archipelago of *maisons de la culture* that Malraux proposed to install across the country. Adopting the antagonism between communism and capitalism that served as a foundation for de Gaulle’s mode of participation, Malraux argued that his new arts institutions would provide art, not “for all” as he understood the totalitarian model to do, but “for each,” that is to say, taking into account individual needs and tastes. His “modern cathedrals” were places where the middlebrow and rural poor would gather in order to be educated according to a program of universal cultural literacy so that they could discover “the best in them.”⁵⁶

Others interested in artistic decentralization in the same period, however, believed that democratizing art should mean that works would be relevant to the existing cultures of their audiences, and they argued that Malraux’s program operated at the expense of regional cultural expression. In 1968, several *maisons de la culture* were reclaimed by protesters and in 1972, Clair devoted an issue of *Chroniques de l’art vivant*, “*La province bouge . . .*,” to covering artists working outside Paris. In his editorial, Clair noted the cultural difference between France and relatively “federalist” countries like Germany or the United States, where numerous cities drew talent to distinct regions, and he argued that the centralization of museums and galleries in the French capital effectively rendered the whole of the country increasingly provincial.⁵⁷ The artists addressed in this book took part in a larger trend of the era that focused on the importance of expanding sites of display and access in order to enrich the lives of the masses, yet, importantly, they did so by promoting the volition of the spectator through an active participation that undermined establishment forms of paternalistic pedagogy.

The street then became a privileged site of artistic display as it allowed

artists to exhibit independently of the authority of institutions and to reach a wider audience. By stepping beyond the walls of the museum or gallery, and farther, venturing beyond Paris, the artists attempted to apprehend the public in their daily lives, whether in pubs, at the market, or midcommute. Moving out into the spaces of everyday life meant that more people would have the opportunity to engage with their artworks, and in some cases it made the work more inherently participatory, since display in public spaces involved inserting the works into the flows of daily activity. Participation, in these cases, was as much a question of audience engagement with the works as it was about the works participating in public life.⁵⁸ This form of decentralization engendered a spontaneity that the artists turned to critical effect as they enjoined the public to incorporate an experience of uselessness into their regimented daily lives by gazing upon an aesthetically disorienting object, or with more pointed motivation, they asked members of the public to comment on their general quality of life. Decentralizing the display of their works to public spaces promoted the avant-garde objective of collapsing art into life by situating it within the flows of routinized expectation, but it is by this same disruption that the works sought to use decentralized participation as a strategy for altering the everyday itself. The reciprocity of participation produced accommodations of spectator to work, and work to environment, that sought the mutual and sympathetic transformation of art and life.

This progression away from the walls of the white cube gallery required a transformation in the art object as well. For the six artists associated with the GRAV, this meant adapting the geometric abstractions of the historical avant-garde, concerned as they were with tuning viewer perception to the rationalized machine aesthetics of their time, to a technocratic era in which rational structures threatened to overwhelm the sensitivities of the individual. By emphasizing optical effects, they sought to create a specifically kinetic perceptual awareness on the part of the viewer. The GRAV's 1966 expedition in the streets of Paris expanded the network of artistic exhibition spaces, but was nevertheless dominated by the same sculptural objects that the group mounted on plinths at the Denise René Gallery. They also incorporated hands-on interactive "gifts" that they gave to the viewers, such as whistles for cinemagoers and pins and balloons to be popped, as well as a questionnaire, thereby moving in the direction of site specificity and ephemeral situation-based practice. While Cadere also began his career making visually destabilizing Op paintings, after 1968 he developed the clutchable bars of wood as specifically mobile objects. Two years earlier, Buren began making in situ striped canvases and posters that critically reflected on their site specificity at the same time as they breached

the closed space that threatened to limit the significance and visibility of the art object. The CAS's media interventions and community interrogations inserted themselves into existing media and sociological networks while they specifically asked the audience to provide the content of the work in the form of information about themselves. They designed these purpose-built forms specifically for maximum distribution to the margins.

To greater and lesser extent, these works simultaneously enacted the demotion of the object that art and technology theorist Frank Popper backdated from Lucy Lippard's dematerialization of conceptual art to the participatory works of the early 1960s.⁵⁹ Even as the aesthetic experience remains central to many of these works, it is not the object itself, Popper argues, that is important, but the process of experimentation into which the object is inserted, and the indetermination as to how the audience will complete the work. Participatory art often eliminates the idea of the finished object, and thereby the masterpiece, substituting for it the research statement, the point of interrogation, the tentative proposition.

Seriality and repetition in particular recur as formal strategies in participatory practice as they materialize the rationalized ethos of anonymous technocracy and the mass reproduction of spectacle culture. The artists whose works this book investigates endeavor, however, to counter both the unity of the unique work of art and the monotony of spectacle monoculture by opening the work to differentiated experiences and interpretations. Responding to the regularized, multiplied forms of geometric abstraction, Umberto Eco argued that art composed by programmed seriality demands a new form of diffused attention as the work becomes self-different.⁶⁰ The subject, whether geometric pattern, survey response, or identically repeated striped awning fabric, elaborates itself over space and time so that any one iteration comes to be seen as part of a greater process of development or experimentation. In serial repetition, the same invariably results in the production of difference among the repeated elements as they are exposed to distinct contexts, and foremost is the developing process of contemplation in the one who regards the repeated object. While habit obviates attentiveness to the distinction of objects, people, or situations, difference in repetition encourages attention to individual forms in a constellation of moments. Attention to series makes what seems apparent become unknown, multiple voices react to a single provocation, and the fragments that make up these montages refer back to their roles in a larger process of signification. Attention to the objects, like the display of those objects then, becomes decentralized, or peripheral, or marginal.

Even as the artworks that this book discusses explicitly called on the

viewer to engage with the mechanisms of their creation and display, the work did not simply negate “autonomy.” The majority are formally at a far remove from autonomous art’s archetype—bourgeois easel painting—and self-consciously so, yet in retaining an antagonistic independence from authorship and the art market, the artists asserted their own autonomy as a form of engagement. Autonomy, in this case, is not freedom from political or religious propaganda made possible by the expansion of the capitalist market. The concept as deployed by these artists instead resembles the concept of *auto-gestion*, or self-management, a central organizing demand of workers and university students during the late 1960s and 1970s. This art, then, reflects back on the way in which the market and art museum have created their own structures that profit from artistic independence at the same time that they limit it by imposing their own historical and critical narratives. As Bürger observed, autonomous art is always only autonomous in relation to what it is autonomous from, and likewise, rather than simply rejecting museums and galleries, artists created objects that called attention specifically to the site of institutional authority as such, and devised exhibition tactics that bent curatorial convention to the benefit of the artist.⁶¹ In conjunction with autonomy, anonymity appears repeatedly as a tactic of resistance against a market that props itself up on the profitability of recognizable names as seriality, automation, found materials, and collective working methods attempted to eliminate the artistic identity on which the market depends. At the same time, however, opposition makes itself visible as such when it adopts a name and a place from which it can pronounce its position. Whereas individual identities are written over by those of collective groups, Buren and Cadere, each working alone, embraced (more or less forthrightly) the power of individual authority, thereby placing in critical conflict the claims of their anonymous working methods with the need for a speaking subjectivity that would embody the antagonism contained within that anonymity.

To the degree that these artists showed in museums and galleries, their exhibitions aimed at leveling them with the streets, the individual home, and in the community as all became sites for immersion in the immediacy of the present as a vehicle to access an experience of the real. Participation and institutional critique provided alternative strategies by which artists could make political work while explicitly rejecting Zhdanovist and Maoist socialist realisms that provided pervading models to French communist painters in the postwar period.⁶² Unlike militant art production, such as that displayed at the annual Salon de la Jeune Peinture (or Young Painters’ Salon), where the art on display hewed to socialist realist modes even as it updated kitsch rep-

resentation with pop aesthetics, the artists that this book examines rejected referential realism.⁶³ They maintained that it promoted an understanding of art and representation that was ultimately conservative as it did not go far enough to undermine the museum model of display. It was at the 1967 Salon de la Jeune Peinture that Buren, and the artists with whom he showed at the time, proclaimed his rejection of painting, and of salons as reactionary venues where artistic imagination becomes pacifying entertainment for an audience that is not asked to reciprocate, intervene, or otherwise invest creatively in the work.⁶⁴ In place of realism, then, this participatory art sought to break down the barrier that representation throws up against the immediacy of interpersonal interaction. Artists attempted to integrate the real in the form of what the CAS artists referred to as “concrete experience.” The real that the artists attempted to access through participatory situations would undermine the divide between art and life, yet would do so by recognizing the ideological frameworks present in both. In some instances, these works suggest that daily lived experience is itself representation—that it is a mediated realism that holds everyday people at arm’s length, rather than giving them access to the real itself. In other instances, their works disordered established social relations, thereby approximating candid experience and creating the immediacy and impression of transparency that simulate an idea of the real. By framing and isolating concrete fragments from their motivated contexts in daily life, the artists’ video- and audio-recorded interviews, photographs, and site-specifying spatial demarcations called attention to the processes of signification with the expectation that the participant would reintegrate a critical awareness of daily practices into the flow of a newly conscious social life.

The urgency to do so was thrown into relief by what Guy Debord famously argued was a postwar culture sufficiently infused by mediated representations that people had become divorced from immediate lived experience and the social relations that animate it.⁶⁵ The collapsing of geographic distances by the rise of television, the beginning of Soviet and American space exploration programs, and the possibility of nuclear annihilation defined the era in terms of immediacy and led many social commentators to feel that they had entered a “posthistorical” moment. This impression was, of course, one of the historically specific characteristics of the time, and borrowing the mass media techniques and rationalized methodologies of technical culture seemed to give artists a footing in a world that seemed, as Henri Lefebvre remarked, technologically beyond the grasp of the everyday citizen.⁶⁶ By explicitly rejecting historical reference in their works, these artists focused attention on immediacy, but they did so in such a way as to slow perception and draw at-

tention to the concrete minutiae of daily life. Participatory art endeavored to embed historical consciousness in the present and affirm that the agency of individuals was located in the process of questioning one's relationship to one's city, to one's community, to one's government, to the Establishment, in order to engage them critically and purposefully.

As Clair pointed out, artists who sought to rectify the destruction of organic community through participatory "animation" projects risked replacing a mythic former real life with the spectacle of it.⁶⁷ More recently, art historian Miwon Kwon has echoed this concern, pointing to the ways in which artists who organize participatory manifestations tend to impose a control over them such that the real conflicts that make community irreducible to representation are erased by the artist's vision.⁶⁸ The artists this book examines were conscious of such pitfalls and attempted to develop forms of participation that undermined their own authorial voice in order to privilege that of the participant. The critique of authorship deployed by these artists was not a simple formalist exercise of structuralist principles concerning the "death of the author." Instead, this critique actively reflected their conviction that the continual negotiation between the individual and society was fundamental to processes associated with democratic politics. Their critique of authorship suggested the possibility of a perpetual vocal and locational displacement beyond the "authority" of institutional spaces, so that no one individual could possibly fix an accepted interpretive mode to explain his or her intervention.

The political nature of the dual conflicts with institutions and engagements with the public that these groups exercised finds expression in Claude Lefort's theorizing of democracy as embedded in both social life and the aesthetic. Decades after his involvement with the antitotalitarian group *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Lefort wrote about the role that institutions play in producing society. Modern society, he argued, creates separate institutions that effectively delimited spheres of knowledge that fail to consider the constitution and integration of the social sphere itself. The political, he argued, could not be defined by "political facts." Instead, he suggested, its activity was revealed "in the double movement whereby the mode of institution of society appears and is obscured."⁶⁹ That is, it is the conflict between the visibility and invisibility of those divisions that defines the power of institutions, and that produces politics. It was important for Lefort, writing in a moment when the crimes of Soviet totalitarianism were fresh on the conscience of leftists, to theorize democracy along these lines so that any fear of its capacity to put a dictator in power, or succumb to mob rule, would be assuaged. Instead, Lefort argues, democracy would preserve indeterminacy because within a democratic

system, the locus of power remains an “empty place,” thanks to periodical redistribution of institutionalized conflict. In championing democracy, Lefort was absolutely seeking not revolution but, rather, the perpetual turnover of particular elements within a space whose openness to all potential voices gave it the accessibility of the universal. Access to power through suffrage does not mean that power resides in society, however, but, rather, it shows that democratic power “remains the agency by virtue of which society apprehends itself in its unity and relates to itself in time and space.”⁷⁰ Emptiness, incompleteness, openness, and the unresolved sublations of dialectical tensions likewise play out across the artworks of the GRAV, Buren, Cadere, and the CAS as they seek to organize their expanded audiences as constitutive elements of the artistic institutions that they critique.

While artists sought to reform rather than revolutionize society, their goals were not necessarily a faint reflection of the ambitions that motivated the political scene in the years before and after the May Movement. In addition to the production of their art objects, the artists engaged in walkouts, wrote condemnatory tracts, and engaged in other protests of refusal. Notable among these was GRAV member Julio Le Parc’s public rejection of the directionless aestheticism of the New Tendency exhibitions in Zagreb; Buren’s performance protest with Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, and Niele Toroni at the Salon de la Jeune Peinture in 1966; and the large-scale rejection of the period-defining *L’exposition 72-72*, which many artists identified as a cynical exercise of soft power by the new president as he sought to appease those who had protested his predecessor’s government four years earlier. Censorship and arrest befell the artists by design, by serendipity, and by misfortunate abuse. Cadere and his artwork were routinely ejected from exhibitions during the 1970s, Buren was beaten and jailed by the police for posterizing in Bern in 1969, and Fred Forest was arrested by the police in São Paulo for holding a public performance of his work that suspiciously resembled a picketing protest during a period of strict censorship by the military government. Such demonstrations of censorship played to these artists’ advantages by affirming the real impact of their formalist critiques that pushed at the limits of acceptable social behavior. Le Parc was more significantly inconvenienced in June 1968 when he was arrested for driving along a highway near a factory worker’s strike and summarily deported by Interior Minister Raymond Marcellin on the authority of a 1945 decree that authorized the expulsion of any foreigner without explanation. Malraux eventually intervened and readmitted Le Parc to the country. Although there was an upsurge in confidence in the possibility for revolution in the years following 1968, Le Parc and other protesters did not call for a to-

tal overthrow of the government.⁷¹ Indeed, in an interview between Jean-Paul Sartre and the leader of the May Movement Daniel Cohn-Bendit, which was published in the midst of the strikes and occupations, Cohn-Bendit repeatedly refused Sartre's suggestion that their goals were revolutionary. Although their actions may have implied more radical ambitions, Cohn-Bendit stated that what they were seeking was a succession of reforms, "adjustments of more or less importance."⁷² Stopping short of storming the Elysée Palace, the leaders' rejection of vanguardism prevented the May Movement from achieving revolutionary stature, thereby earning the praise of Lefort, who commended their refusal of hierarchy, their opening up, without then filling in, that empty place of democracy.⁷³

At base, the move to express singularity and the move to represent a larger society are consistent with each other as the anonymous symbol of the collective represents the individual in his or her appeal to a common ground as a basis for intelligibility. When individuals fail to seek the representation that is provided by democratic systems, they risk resigning themselves to authorities that eradicate difference and, as a result, produce banality and alienation. Indeed, as the support structures for alternative utopian social configurations came undone in the post-1968 years, the dark side of anonymity began to show in the suicides, as Kristin Ross calls them, of "nobody in particular."⁷⁴ The challenge of creating unified communities would then be to privilege the role of the individual as an essential constitutive element. Just as the artists took their relationship to the institutions of art as a point not of simple rejection, but of active contestation and negotiation, so too their efforts to activate both their own and the spectator's relationships to larger social and institutional fields enjoined the disorderly conflicts inherent in such associations.

Drawing upon the observations of philosopher Jacques Rancière, Ross argues that one of the major accomplishments of May 1968 was the destruction of the boundaries between social categories that had been created and policed by sociologists. The very union of students and workers, young and old, was in itself a meaningful enactment of the social change the protesters sought. The transgression of boundaries similarly served as a basic strategy for undermining the divide between art object and viewer, artist and institution, individual and community, which the artists showed to be mutually constitutive as they breached disciplinary boundaries between art, sociology, and journalism. Debate was a central strategy to many of these artists' efforts to strengthen social relations as they made use of artworks as launching points for discussion. A viewer confronted with a kinetic painting by the GRAV, for example, was to become aware that seeing is an active process, that the artwork depended on

the viewer to activate the illusion of movement on the still surface, and the resulting chaotic perceptual instability would call the lucidity of information communication and rationality into question. Buren sought to spur the public to act independently by confronting them with the absence of a direct message. Cadere vacated the gallery of traditional exhibition, instead promenading about with his bars that he used to instigate conversations with the public. The CAS interrogated the disagreements between individuals within neighborhoods, transforming grievance among elderly and ethnic groups into opportunities for self-expression through visual and auditory records that would provide fodder for dialogue.

This study is divided into four chapters, each of which situates the work of a particular group or artist within the set of interlinked problematics described above. Chapter 1 covers the first decade of the Fifth Republic, which approximately coincides with the founding and dissolution of the GRAV. This international group, composed of Horacio Garcia-Rossi, François Morellet, Julio Le Parc, Francisco Sobrino, Joël Stein, and Yvaral, was interested in the socially transformative potential of perceptual experience. I consider their claims in terms of what I describe as the “technocratic aesthetic” that they adopted to produce highly rationalized, schematic paintings, sculptures, and wearable objects. The artists offset the rigidity of their programmatic output with an “instability” that they argued would produce participation as the viewer became self-aware in the process of perceiving the optical illusion of their kinetic art. This instability further, I argue, provided a way for the artists to undermine the idea that information age cybernetics was inherently coherent. While the artists defined reality in terms of communication and made their objects according to “new methods of approximation, combinatorial possibility, statistics, [and] probability,”⁷⁵ the instability of the work that they produced negated the communicative ability of the data on which their production methods were based. One instance of this was the questionnaires that they distributed at gallery exhibitions, notably during their *Day in the Street* (1966). This traveling exhibition, which they showed at public locations around central Paris, achieved the fullest expression of their efforts to recreate the “spontaneous totality” of everyday life, the loss of which Lefebvre lamented resulted from the calculations and good intentions of technocratic sociologists who were responsible for developing the planned communities and subsidized housing that the artists adopted as a site for the distribution

of their democratizing multiples. I analyze the group's popular reception through the mass spectacle metaphors that it evoked in the press. More than just destabilizing formal unity, the hypnotic effects of their work decentralized viewers, forcing them to either become attuned to the visual techniques of technocratic spectacle culture, or remain peripheral to the constitution of the work and any political implications it might otherwise yield.

Chapter 2 addresses the institutional critique of Daniel Buren. During the 1960s and 1970s, Buren produced paintings on striped awning canvas that he showed in situ both in galleries and in the streets, and *affichages sauvages*, wild postings of striped paper on public hoardings and construction sites. Like the GRAV artists, Buren was critical of the dominant models for making politically conscious art, and of the salons where they were exhibited, and like the Op artists, he turned to critiques of authorship and viewer participation in order to devise a form of art that would expose the power dynamic between artist and institution. He distanced himself from the GRAV's populist teleological interventions, however, suggesting that their participation was just another form of exploitation. In contrast, he drew upon advances in structuralist thinking of the 1950s and 1960s to develop an in situ practice that highlighted the formal, functional, and social contingencies of space. Rather than objects to be looked at for their formal qualities, he considered his striped abstractions "visual tools," and claimed that they would invite viewer participation by providing a provocatively minimal amount of visual information. Indeed, his public exhibitions are frequently so effectively suited to their place of display that they disappear into their environment altogether. My analysis focuses on the ways that his objects oscillated between visibility and invisibility, as they seemed to emerge from, or stand in contrast against, the public or private, temporary or permanent, architectural spaces in which he exhibited them. In doing so, his work shifted the perception of the viewer, not through optical illusion but through the artwork's relation to its spatial and institutional positioning. While the frequent alignment of Buren's work with conceptual art typically diminishes its visual aspects, my analysis addresses the role of visibility and perception, situating his work in dialogue with other artistic tendencies of his time, including abstract serial painting, *décollage*, and socially conscious geometric abstraction.

Chapter 3 investigates André Cadere, a Romanian artist who moved to Paris in 1967 and there began producing round bars of painted wooden spools, the display of which was intended to point to the spatial exercise of institutional power. Like Buren's striped abstractions, Cadere's "round bars of wood," as he called them, were produced in serial so that the recognizable objects

would stand out against the various grounds where he would position them. Cadere indeed adopted Buren's phrase "*il s'agit de voir*" (it is a matter of seeing) to insist that the critique his work offered operated through visual self-evidence rather than by referring to any external discursive apparatus. At the same time, Cadere engaged in a more persistently antagonistic relationship to arts establishments. Because he intended his work to be carried in hand, he was able to exhibit it anywhere and unexpectedly, often displaying it at other artists' gallery openings, a practice that both amused and enervated other artists and gallerists. Rather than illustrating structures of institutional power as did many of Buren's exhibitions throughout the 1970s, Cadere attempted to use his display tactics to change the way that the system worked. His critique resembled leftist politics of post-1968 France, yet with the key difference that his experience living through Soviet repression in Romania during the 1950s and 1960s contributed to the more liberal position that he adopted in his antagonism to what he saw as the false freedoms of the West. Cadere strategically used the position of marginality that he already occupied as a foreigner to assert his independence from a system that he made work for him on his own terms, while at the same time ranging across and diminishing the borders that divided the insides and outsides of the Western European art world.

Finally, Chapter 4 concerns the Collectif d'Art Sociologique, which sought to recuperate society by transforming the experiments in social science that were taking place in the years following 1968 into an artistic practice. Hervé Fischer, Fred Forest, and Jean-Paul Thénot came together in 1974 to form a group that took the public itself as the medium of its artistic practice. Collaborating with intellectuals of the time, including sociologist Edgar Morin, philosopher Henri Lefebvre, and media-theorist Vilém Flusser, they attempted to use their art to develop a sociological practice that would improve community interaction. They used surveys and the mass media to solicit public participation, and organized community events designed to communicate across neighborhood boundaries by forefronting the textures of everyday life. The personal approach that they took to sociological interaction resembles the "phenomenographic" model that Morin argued researchers should adopt as a Balzac-like approach to observing gesture, dress, habitation, and other details in order to create a "sociological snapshot." At the same time, they highlighted the relational contingencies of the situations that they created in order to reflect on the impact of their own subjective positions, as well as the power relations that animated the places where they showed, which included galleries and museums, but also media venues like newspapers and television shows, and social-political contexts that ranged from social alienation of the

elderly in France to repression under the military dictatorship in Brazil. These artists refused to systematically analyze the data that they collected and they rejected functional resolutions and theoretical models. They instead chose to investigate what technocrats would have rejected as anomalous activities, and they embraced a permanent disequilibrium that resembles the instabilities cultivated by the programmatic painting and institutional critique examined in the first three chapters. According to Morin, such a practice would allow the sociologist (or artist) to discover holistic pictures of human subjects by analyzing social phenomena, because those phenomena would be understood as contingent and unstable.

The chapters progress chronologically with overlap between years of activity in order to demonstrate continuity and change. My intention is to demonstrate how these groups participated in a set of discourses current during the period in question, in particular around the relationship between art, politics, and society. In some cases, there was explicit influence, whether in the form of emulation or rejection. In every instance, however, the artists combined their critiques of institutions with a concern for the habitus of the social context in which their works took place. Although this study focuses on a limited period in the production of each artist, most of them were working for periods that extend well beyond the 1960s and 1970s, and their works testify to a broader historical trend that valued participation and critical display tactics as antidotes to the technocratic and consumerist culture that both fascinated and repulsed them. Juxtaposing these diverse practices should bring to light the various concerns and contradictions that animated one set of practices even as it remained secondary in another, thereby rendering the reader's understanding of each of the practices more complex. Further, by setting such practices in conversation, I hope that their relative utopian optimisms and realist pessimisms, vaunting of collectivity or retrenchment into the individual, humor and seriousness, and greater and lesser inclusiveness of the viewer will reveal the strengths, contradictions, and shortcomings of the various practices, and provide substantive fodder for furthering disorderly democratic art.

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NOTES

Introduction

- 1 André Cadere, *Histoire d'un travail* (Gent: Herbert-Gewad, 1982), § 44. On June 8, 1977, he held a second *Établir le désordre* event in Brussels, which led to a significantly longer two-and-a-half-hour debate with the public, possibly because it was mediated by Georges Roque. Lynda Morris, ed., *André Cadere: Documenting Cadere, 1972–1978* (London: Koenig, 2013), 134.
- 2 On the violence in post–World War II French art, see Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, *L'ordre sauvage: Violence dépense et sacré dans l'art des années, 1950–1960* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004); Hannah Feldman, *From a Nation Torn: Decolonizing Art and Representation in France, 1945–1962* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
- 3 On intimacy as a form of institutional critique, see Rebecca DeRoo, *The Museum Establishment and Contemporary Art: The Politics of Artistic Display in France after 1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- 4 Mireille Gaüzère, “Le Centre Georges-Pompidou,” in *Culture et action chez Georges Pompidou*, ed. Jean-Claude Groshens and Jean-François Sirinelli (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000), 417.
- 5 François Derivery, *L'exposition 72-72* (Paris: E. C. Editions, 2001), 5.
- 6 Derivery, *L'exposition 72-72*, 6. There was heavy censorship in 1971: two works by Lucien Mathelin were taken down from the contemporary arts section of the Musée d'Art Modern de la Ville de Paris at the order of the police. The police closed a Bernard Rancillac show at Centre National d'Art Contemporain on the evening of its opening due to “disrespect of good manners.” A canvas on the subject of racism by Paolo Baratella was destroyed in the town of Brive. Two canvasses by J. P. Favre and R. Claude were seized in Tours. A Gérard Tisserand was also taken down for political reason, and further censorship took place in Houdain, Aubenas, Vimoutiers, and Villejuif.
- 7 The museum was given the name of Georges Pompidou in the law of January 3, 1975.
- 8 Charles de Gaulle, “Décret n. 59-889 du 24 juillet 1959 portant organization du ministère chargé des affaires culturelles,” *Journal officiel de la république française*, July 26, 1959, 7413.
- 9 Feldman, *From a Nation Torn*, 19–41.
- 10 Gaüzère, “Le Centre Georges-Pompidou,” 415.
- 11 Catherine Millet, *Contemporary Art in France* (Paris: Flammarion, 2015), 13.
- 12 For a detailed analysis of the effect that the Marshall Plan had on art during the 1950s and 1960s in the Italian context, see Jaleh Mansoor, *Marshall Plan Modernism: Italian Postwar Abstraction and the Beginnings of Autonomia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

- 13 Philippe Poirrier, "Cultural Practices during the 1960s and 1970s," in Groshens and Sirinelli, *Culture et action chez Georges Pompidou*, 126.
- 14 Cited in Poirrier, "Cultural Practices during the 1960s and 1970s," 129.
- 15 Georges Pompidou, *Le nœud gordien* (Paris: Flammarion, 1984), 201–202, cited in Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, "L'art du mouvement," in Groshens and Sirinelli, *Culture et action chez Georges Pompidou*, 120.
- 16 Commissariat Général du Plan, V^e Plan, Commission de l'équipement culturel et du patrimoine artistique, Rapport general (La documentation française, 1966), 6, cited in Laurent Gayme, "La place de la culture dans la planification," in Groshens and Sirinelli, *Culture et action chez Georges Pompidou*, 147.
- 17 Commissariat Général du Plan, 151.
- 18 Commissariat Général du Plan, 151.
- 19 Commissariat Général du Plan, 146.
- 20 Laurent Fleury, *Sociology of Culture and Cultural Practices: The Transformative Power of Institutions*, trans. Michael Lavin (New York: Lexington Books, 2011), 53, emphasis in the original.
- 21 Gaüzère, "Le Centre Georges-Pompidou," 415–421.
- 22 Fleury, *Sociology of Culture and Cultural Practices*, xxii–xxiii.
- 23 Fleury, *Sociology of Culture and Cultural Practices*, 50.
- 24 Fleury, *Sociology of Culture and Cultural Practices*, 148.
- 25 Gaüzère, "Le Centre Georges-Pompidou," 419.
- 26 Georges Bensaïd, *La culture planifiée* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 14, cited in Gayme, "La place de la culture dans la planification," 143.
- 27 Georges Pompidou and Jacques Michel, "Le président de la République définit ses conceptions dans les domaines de l'art et de l'architecture M. Pompidou évoque les questions du plateau Beaubourg et des tours de la Défense," *Le Monde*, October 17, 1972, cited in Fleury, *Sociology of Culture and Cultural Practices*, xxvii.
- 28 Dorléac, "L'art du mouvement," 111.
- 29 Dorléac, "L'art du mouvement," 121–122.
- 30 On this last point, see chapter 7, "The Influence of Mediation Apparatuses on the Structuring of Cultural Practices: The Pompidou Center's 'Correspondents,'" in Fleury, *Sociology of Culture and Cultural Practices*, 99–114.
- 31 Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano, cited in Nathan Silver, *The Making of Beaubourg: A Building Biography of the Centre Pompidou, Paris* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 104.
- 32 Rogers and Piano, cited in Silver, *Making of Beaubourg*, 104.
- 33 Rogers and Piano, cited in Silver, *Making of Beaubourg*, 104.
- 34 Gaüzère, "Le Centre Georges-Pompidou," 421.
- 35 Louis Chevalier, *The Assassination of Paris*, trans. David P. Jordan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 210–263.
- 36 Jean Clair, "Les arts de la rue," *Chroniques de l'art vivant* 46 (February 1974): 2–3.
- 37 Pierre Mazeaud, "À 40 ans, la loi sur la participation reste d'actualité," *Le Figaro*, August 17, 2007.
- 38 Martin Harrison and Philip M. Williams, *Politics and Society in de Gaulle's Republic* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1973), 351–356.

- 39 Chevalier, *Assassination of Paris*, 103.
- 40 “La Participation. Recensement et analyse des déclarations du général de Gaulle. Rapport du Cercle d’Etudes de l’Institut Charles de Gaulle sous la direction de M. Philippe Cavenave,” *Espoir* 5 (1973–1974): 46–48.
- 41 Between 1956 and 1966, minimum wage for workers rose only 6 percent whereas pretax incomes of executives and managers went up by 48.7 percent. Harrison and Williams, *Politics and Society in de Gaulle’s Republic*, 13, 351–352.
- 42 Harrison and Williams, *Politics and Society in de Gaulle’s Republic*, 399.
- 43 Harrison and Williams, *Politics and Society in de Gaulle’s Republic*, 435, 437.
- 44 “La Participation. Recensement et analyse des déclarations du général de Gaulle,” 48.
- 45 Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, “Why Sociologists?,” in *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative* (London: Deutsch, 1968), 34–38.
- 46 Cohn-Bendit and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, “Why Sociologists?,” 36.
- 47 Mel Ramsden, “On Practice,” *The Fox* 1, no. 1 (1975): 66–83.
- 48 Hal Foster, “Who’s Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?,” in *Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 3.
- 49 Benjamin Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 128.
- 50 Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969,” 129.
- 51 Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969,” 143.
- 52 Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 295.
- 53 Hal Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer,” in Foster, *Return of the Real*, 203.
- 54 Ramsden, “On Practice,” 69.
- 55 Vivien A. Schmidt, *Democratizing France: The Political and Administrative History of Decentralization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 77–79.
- 56 André Malraux, “Intervention d’André Malraux à l’Assemblée Nationale sur le budget des affaires culturelles,” Paris, October 27, 1966.
- 57 Jean Clair, “La province bouge . . .,” *Chroniques de l’art vivant* 33 (October 1972): 2.
- 58 In the last decade there has been an increase in academic work on participation in art. Notable sustained and critical contributions to the field include Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), which examines a series of politically critical practices across twentieth-century Europe; and Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), which addresses site-specific collaborative art projects from across the globe.
- 59 Frank Popper, *Art—Action and Participation* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 12.
- 60 Umberto Eco and Bruno Munari, *Arte programmata: Arte cinetica: Opere moltiplicate: Opera aperta* (Milan: Officina d’arte grafica A. Lucini, 1962), n.p.
- 61 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 50.
- 62 Francis Parent and Raymond Perrot, *Le Salon de la Jeune Peinture: Une histoire 1950–1963* (Montreuil: Jeune Peinture, 1983), 13.

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