OCTOBER FILES

JOHN KNIGHT

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October Files

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JOHN KNIGHT

edited by André Rottmann

essays and interviews by Anne Rorimer, Dan Graham, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Kim Gordon, Jay Sanders, Marie-Ange Brayer, Birgit Pelzer, Isabelle Graw, Alexander Alberro, and André Rottmann

OCTOBER FILES 16

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Series Preface

OCTOBER Files addresses individual bodies of work of the postwar period that meet two criteria: they have altered our understanding of art in significant ways, and they have prompted a critical literature that is serious, sophisticated, and sustained. Each book thus traces not only the development of an important oeuvre but also the construction of the critical discourse inspired by it. This discourse is theoretical by its very nature, which is not to say that it imposes theory abstractly or arbitrarily. Rather, it draws out the specific ways in which significant art is theoretical in its own right, on its own terms and with its own implications. To this end we feature essays, many first published in *OCTOBER* magazine, that elaborate different methods of criticism in order to elucidate different aspects of the art in question. The essays are often in dialogue with one another as they do so, but they are also as sensitive as the art to political context and historical change. These "files," then, are intended as primers in signal practices of art and criticism alike, and they are offered in resistance to the amnesiac and antitheoretical tendencies of our time.

The Editors of *OCTOBER*

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Bruxelles, 1996) documenting John Knight's contribution to *De Campagne,* a program of art in public space organized by Lily van Ginneken for Stroom, The Hague (Netherlands), in 1992–1993; it is here reprinted in a new translation from the French. "Who's Afraid of JK? An Interview with John Knight," by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Isabelle Graw, originally appeared in German in *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 59 (September 2005) and was later included in its original English version in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009). Alexander Alberro's "Meaning at the Margins: The Semiological Inversions of John Knight" first appeared in the catalog *John Knight: 87°,* published in 2001 by the Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York, on the occasion of Knight's permanent installation (1999–) of the same name, and was later reprinted in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John Welchman (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2006). "Knight's Negations," by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, was originally published in the aforementioned catalog *John Knight: 87°* (Mountainville, NY: Storm King Art Center) in 2001. André Rottmann's "Displacing the Site: John Knight and the Museum as Modulation" first appeared in the exhibition catalog *John Knight: Autotypes*, ed. Alex Kitnick (New York: Greene Naftali) in 2011.

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John Knight: Designating the Site

Anne Rorimer

As demonstrated by the works in the current exhibition, John Knight has developed a highly diverse body of work over the last twenty years. During this period Knight has successively arrived at alternative visual solutions to works whose formal variety ultimately rests on a cohesive set of consistent principles that underlie his aesthetic inquiry. In works dating from 1969 through 1989, one may follow the way in which his methodology has served him in his reevaluation of the work of art as an object that is bound by a number of definitive expectations traditionally associated with it.

The early work of Knight, represented in the exhibition by *Levels* (1969), set itself apart from the innovations brought about by Minimal artists such as Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, or Sol LeWitt in the decade of the 1960s and, in so doing, established the direction that his later work would take. Two important aspects of *Levels* distinguish it from previous approaches to sculptural practice. Consisting of carpenters' levels purchased from the hardware store and arranged on the studio floor in a number of different arrangements—in circles, squares, lines, and so on—these works, on the one hand, referred to the basic, reduced shapes of Minimal sculpture whose primary forms and industrial materials sought to divest sculpture of everything but its essential, three-dimensional presence. On the other hand, they took their cue from the interchange engendered by such work with its physical setting, whether indoors or outside. To all intents and purposes, works by Andre, Flavin, Judd, or LeWitt define themselves as self-sufficient, self-contained objects—or, in

the case of Flavin and LeWitt, as entire room installations—at the same time as they respond and adapt to their appointed spatial environments. Although comparable with Flavin's works constructed out of commercially available fluorescent light fixtures, and thus using common, nonart objects of everyday use, *Levels* introduced a new thematic dimension to the relationship between the object of art and its given exhibition space as initially fostered by Minimalism. Unlike light fixtures, Knight's objects possess a function beyond their concrete, material adaptability to the purposes of art because they are able to register their own topological placement.

Levels, significantly, does not merely refer to the site but also explicitly comments on the position of its elements within the surroundings. Employing actual tools of representation as well as of construction, the levels incur an overt dialogue between the work and its site, providing an actual and precise *reading* of the one in terms of the other. Inspired by the desire to critically address the issues raised by Minimal art, *Levels* set a precedent for all works by Knight to follow.

In the year that he produced *Levels,* Knight also began to experiment with closed circuit video. At the gallery of California State University in

John Knight, *Levels,* 1969, installation view, artist's studio, Inglewood, Los Angeles, 1969.

Los Angeles he exhibited a work in 1969 that consisted of an image appearing on a video monitor placed in one corner of the room, which displayed a different, adjacent corner of the same space. Other videos of this type included views of an area of activity in the university separate from the location where the monitor was installed, or views out of the window of a different room from the one in which the TV screen was situated. Although never publicly shown again, these video pieces attest to his search at this time for methods of ensuring that the content of each work represents aspects of its otherwise unobservable context.

Like *Levels,* the video works united the object of art with its environment by means of signifying agents, be these an image on a TV monitor or information imparted by carpenters' tools. Subsequent works by Knight similarly resulted from his discovery of procedures to connect the object with its surroundings. *One Inch to a Foot* (1971), originally exhibited in 1973 at the Riko Mizuno Gallery, Los Angeles, integrates the verbal and graphic elements of the title's statement with the exhibition space when the words "one inch to a foot"—etched in one-inch-high Helvetica letters on the glass plate of a floor-mounted, standard overhead projector—illuminate the wall onto which they were projected as one-foot-high letters. In this work, Knight succeeded in fusing language, light, and architecture through the use of words, which literally articulate their spatial confines as both representational fact and abstract figuration. Just as the meaning of the phrase "one inch to a foot" coincides with the reality of the letter sizes etched on the glass projector plate and projected on the wall respectively, the letters themselves function simply as elegantly designed objects while they are framed by the architecture in which the work is situated. As in the case of *Levels*, *One Inch to a Foot* may be shifted from one exhibition space to another but nonetheless is always conjoined in signlike fashion with its place of presentation.

Knight has continued to base his work on the interplay between the material object and its contextual conditions as these are made manifest by representation. Relying primarily on language during the first half of the 1970s and, for the most part, defining context with respect to physical sites, Knight had, by the second half of the decade, extended the concept of location to a consideration of the work's place within the cultural system. In parallel manner, he also embarked on a further investigation and more complex implementation of representational systems—including but not confined to language—in conjunction with art and nonart systems of support.

John Knight, *One Inch to a Foot,* 1971, installation view, Riko Mizuno Gallery, Los Angeles, November 1973.

Untitled (The Don and Maureen Campbell Diagram to Be Applied in Any Metaphoric Manner They Wish) (1977), a tri-part, folding greeting card with a shiny, institutional green exterior finish,[1] contains a fictional, visual narrative on the inside. Upon invitation from the artist and filmmaker Morgan Fisher to participate in a guest-edited issue of the *Journal* of The Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art to be devoted to crossovers between art and film, Knight first published this narrative as a sequence of four pages. Illustrative diagrams and captions convey the story. Whereas the first panel of the narrative inside the card displays a floor plan of the typical American suburban house,[2] the second plots the frenetic activity of filming its interior. As the text on the front of the card explains:

> Thrilled by the realization of their first home, Don and Maureen Campbell decided to have a film made of their new environment. Don plans to send prints to close friends and business associates in lieu of Xmas cards.

The final panel of the card presents a jagged, random-looking shape with jutting points that, one learns from the caption, represents the outline of the diagrammed activity of filming the house, which is to be used "as a design for the rumpus room" planned by the Campbells.

The narrative content of the card provides a comic parable about the removal—or, literally, the abstraction—of form from social actuality. The resulting outlandish, disembodied shape parodies the image-consciousness of the metaphoric Campbells who, seeking to keep up with the times (and "with the Joneses"), are already out of date because the "rumpus room" harks back to the period of the 1950s. Knight's work thus speaks of the arbitrary nature and meaninglessness of form when it issues from subjective decision-making processes that are uninformed by or disengaged from the conditions of present-day, social reality. The card additionally demonstrates the nature of Knight's own aesthetic modus operandi in his derivation of abstract shape from functional forms of representation. As opposed to the outmoded, misguided Campbells, however, Knight does not lose sight of the fictions propagated within society at large but, rather, seeks to contend with them.

Following shortly upon the Don and Maureen Campbell work, the ongoing *Journals Series,* commencing in 1977, functions like the card, but more dramatically, in its transformation of a nonart means of communication—the mailed greeting card—from an otherwise unprecious object into one that can attain artistic status within the domain of art because this is defined by a particular system of cultural presuppositions and beliefs. By examining how the usually separate systems of art and nonart representation can operate in conjunction with and in contrast to one another, *Journals Series* sheds light on how these systems may converge.

For the realization of *Journals Series,* Knight has, during the past decade, mailed approximately a hundred one-year or six-month gift subscriptions of high-gloss, popular journals to selected recipients personally known to him, most of whom are involved in the arts as artists, collectors, curators, art dealers, architects, and so on. Journals devoted to particular subjects, which can be obtained from most newsstands, are chosen by the artist, who takes the specific interests or lifestyle of each recipient directly into account. He thereby throws the nature of the magazines as they present contemporary life—whether in terms of a sumptuous, color-coordinated interior featured in *Metropolitan Homes* or

a spectacular landscape view in "living" technicolor on the cover of *Arizona Highways*—ironically into relief vis-à-vis the recipients' actual activities or attitudes to life and living. *Apartment Life*, *Bon Appetit*, *Field and Stream,* and *Town and Country* are among the numerous magazines that Knight has sent to selected recipients. Whatever the journal's focus happens to be—interior design, cooking, fashion, nature, or art—it personifies the "realities" touted by the mass media.

Knight relies on the fact that although the magazines themselves are not art, they are subject to similar pitfalls and perform some of the same roles: as decorative objects (displayed on coffee tables), for example, or as collectible items of eventual rarity accrued with the passage of time. By means of their manipulation of tasteful, pleasing design practices, moreover, each magazine, in the interest of variety, superficially varies its cover image from issue to issue yet continues to maintain the same devices for its basic formal and compositional layout. Without disturbing the overriding effect of cumulative uniformity, each new cover thus preserves its stock of visual formulas beneath its apparent diversity.

The subscriptions sent by Knight attain art status as a result of how they are "read" by the recipient—either as the magazines that they are or as the work of an artist that must be "handled with care," or both—and by how they are, or are not, assigned value by the culture. Individual ownership, as well as temporary public installation of examples of the received journals in an arrangement decided by the borrower, completes and invests the work with its meaning.[3] Denuded of the traditional, material attributes of art and in the guise of nonart, *Journals Series* reveals the mechanisms that allow a work of art to circulate on different levels once the artist has set it in motion. At the same time, the work as a whole embraces within its own construct as art the illusions and fantasies that the magazines uncritically proffer as real.

With *Journals Series* Knight re-presents already existing, nonart representation within the framework of art in order to explore the point at which art and nonart systems overlap. He inquires into what the factors potentially responsible for determining an object's worth beyond the purely visual qualities of its color, form, and image might be. The fact of authorship? The compliance of the receiver/owner in giving it value? The object's scarcity or age? Its surface appeal as decor/ation? Its acceptance within an institutional, exhibition context? Or all of the above?

Composed of ordinary magazines, Knight's work deliberately opens itself to question. Although mass media reproduction per se is literally untouched by the artist, it is rechanneled through the conduits of the art world. With Knight's intervention into nonaesthetic systems, the part played by representation at various and seemingly separate levels of the culture is brought up for critical review. In addition, Knight subjects the work of art, conventionally defined as a materially precious or singular, handcrafted object in its own right, to a process of examination. The circumstantial factors that inform and give credence to art are thus incorporated by Knight into the work itself.

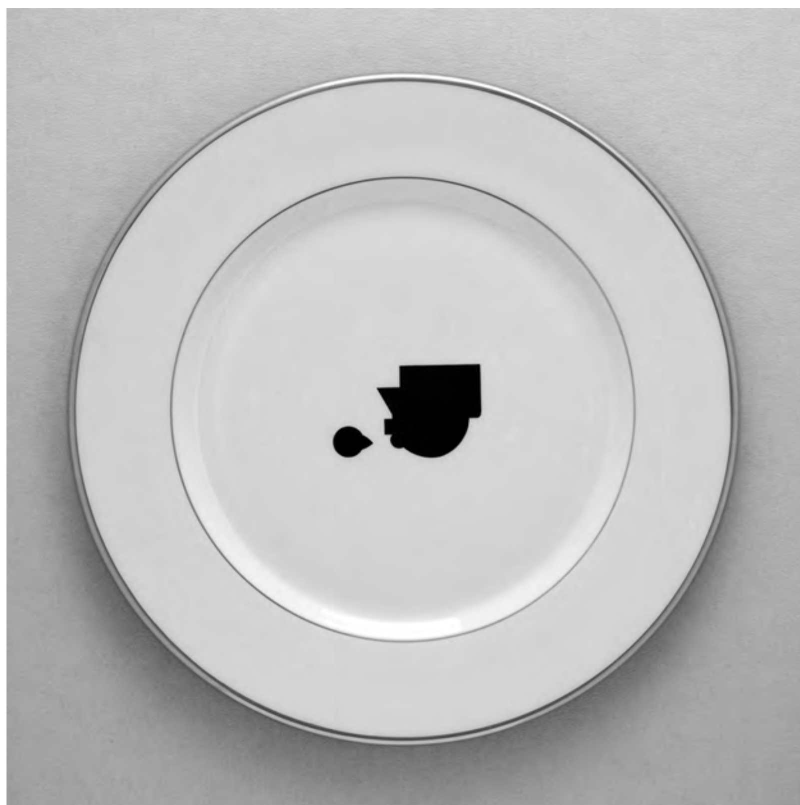
Knight's series of "JK" reliefs (1982), originally conceived for the documenta 7 exhibition in Kassel, Germany, also unites the conventions of mass media reproduction with those of art, the former thus serving to question the latter and vice versa. Large wooden letters designating the artist's initials, elided to form a monogram, provide a ground for the slick, commercial travel posters that Knight has contoured to the shape of the letters and adhered to their surface. The underlying wood support where the poster paper ends is left uncovered by Knight and, slightly protruding, is reminiscent of the handcrafted object. It thus offers a nostalgic vestige of a preindustrial era unencumbered by issues of mechanical reproduction.

The documenta work draws attention to the interrelationships between the aesthetics of economics and the economics of aesthetics insofar as art and nonart representation are concerned. When cut and glued to the wooden relief of Knight's monogram, the travel posters, providing alluring images of foreign lands or cities, relinquish their coherent, promotional capacity but retain their decorative devices. Alternatively, the shape of the "JK" initials features the artist's own self-promotional, authenticating trademark and self-referentially defines the resulting work in terms of the value inherent in the artist's personal sign/ature. The "JKs," therefore, bring the standardized, decorative devices beneath the posters' romanticized imagery to the fore and they simultaneously point to the commercial value arising from authorial authenticity at the basis of all works of art.

Developed directly after the documenta piece, *Museotypes* (1983) was exhibited at the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago before entering the permanent collection of The Art Institute of Chicago. It similarly uses otherwise unrelated representational systems, here

fusing them in a single work composed of sixty gold-rimmed, eggshell-colored, bone china commemorative plates. Presented like a series of collectors' plates, they all possess a small-scale, centralized, solid, cobalt blue form whose eccentric, abstract shapes, although appearing to be of a kind, are distinctly differentiated from one another. The title of the piece clarifies the fact that each shape represents the individual ground plan of one of sixty art museums located around the world, which Knight has chosen for use as if they were emblematic trademarks or corporate logotypes.

The union of commemorative plate and museum ground plan–cum-logotype functions thematically on a number of levels. Just as *Journals Series* and the documenta work allow nonart representation to be



John Knight, *Museotypes,* 1983, detail.

subsumed into that of art, *Museotypes* steps over the line usually dividing fine art from popular or decorative art. The commemorative plate, as employed by Knight, takes advantage of and discloses the common ground shared by "high" and "low" art alike because it is simultaneously an image-bearing vehicle and, although mass-produced, exists in limited editions as a sought-after collectible that can be hung on a wall or over a mantelpiece to accent an interior decor. With the substitution of his so-called museotypes for the imagery usually associated with collectors' plates—ranging from historical sites to baseball heroes or from family crests to famous paintings—Knight ironically "exhibits" and pays homage to the museum as the ultimate site of cultural display and approbation within the material, formal, and representational parameters of the work. Each museum, identified by its plan rather than portrayed as an architectural facade, serves literally as an abstract element of *design* at the center of its plate and figuratively as the *sign* both for a particular building and for the art institution par excellence. Knight's museotype image, therefore, is at once a self-referential, site-specific, and, it might be said, a site-general form connoting the culturally ordained bastion for housing, exhibiting, and sanctioning works of art. Because of the obvious reference to good business and selling techniques signaled by the graphic device of the logotype, *Museotypes* becomes "a representation of the museum and its role in the culture."[4] It bears witness to its own—and to the institution's—reliance on the greater commercial context to which it, as a work of art, belongs and from which neither it nor the museum are exempt. Although addressing the question of how aesthetic value is determined, *Museotypes,* furthermore, extricates itself from that which it seeks to critique: the unique and precious object that merely depends upon rarity or nostalgic associations with the past, upon signs of authorial authenticity or expression, or upon its decorative appeal without, in turn, providing self-referential reflection on its own situation in the culture.

In its reconciliation of usually incompatible art/nonart or high/low art elements into a cohesive material whole, *Museotypes* marks an important step in Knight's development, as ensuing works suggest. The *Mirror Series* (1986–), *Il Diritto All'Ozio* (1987), and *Łeetsoii* (1987) likewise integrate their formal, material, and representational content with the cultural context they inhabit. As in the case of *Museotypes,* it is the de/sign capacity of the corporate logotype that binds the formal and

ideological concerns of many of Knight's later works together and allies them with the socioeconomic underpinnings of their support.

The wooden reliefs from the open-ended *Mirror Series* (numbering twelve in all to date), singular or in a group, directly reflect their immediate exhibition environment on the shiny surface of their "picture plane" and also, quite literally, framing it.[5] Whereas the centralized images of *Museotypes* present a pictorial alphabet of codified shapes, it is the frame of each piece in *Mirror Series* that, in actual fact, surrounds its given surroundings with a formally and materially coded language of contoured shapes measuring about a meter in diameter. The wooden frames in every case assume the shape of an existing logotype.[6] They thereby embody the same principles of the geometrically based corporate design that is tailored to the "hard-edge" necessity for a rapidly grasped, promotional company image.

The type of wood chosen by Knight for the frames of the mirrors further layers the meaning of the work. Although appearing to have been stamped out by precision instruments like a metal or plastic logotype, each frame, deftly pieced together as if by a machine, has been fabricated with boards of knotty pine and coated with a clear lacquer finish. In contrast to the multinational associations occasioned by the logo form, the knotty pine—complete with randomly dispersed knots and the linear grooves of regularly spaced paneling—evokes the walls of the "family room" or "den" of American, middle-class interiors whose rustic mode refers to the spirit of bygone, pioneer days. Works in *Mirror Series* invert the traditional, illusionistic figure/ground relationship. The frame of each piece participates in the creation of an image at the same time that its internally contained, mirror-image of reality, in effect and figuratively speaking only, "frames" the work's outer edge, which is where the work's representational content is now to be found instead of within its boundary.

Mirror Series succeeds in confronting the question of image making from aesthetic and social standpoints simultaneously, having grafted the formal and connotational characteristics of the logotype to those of the knotty pine. On one level, these works deliver a true picture of the reality they duplicate on their reflective surface. However, in as much as social structures determine frameworks for seeing, the mirrors intimate, on another level, the necessity for viewing observable reality within a social perspective. By combining references to vernacular home interior

design schemes with signs for large-scale business ventures, Knight's objects—directly alluding to the tradition of portraiture—portray the interconnections between visible reality and social fictions in terms of their own self-reflective, but outwardly directed, character as mirror, image, and picture frame together.

The group of twelve chaise lounges accompanied by a plaque of verd antique marble, engraved with the work's title, *Il Diritto All'Ozio* (*The Right to Be Lazy*), resulted from Knight's participation in the group exhibition *Non in Codice,* organized by the Mario Pieroni Gallery, Rome. The canvas material of the chairs is a rich Pompeian orange and imprinted with an evenly dispersed field of army green circles that, upon close scrutiny, are observed to be the insignia of the American Academy in Rome where several works in the exhibition were installed outdoors in the garden across the street. Within the circular form of this insignia, the full name of the academy and its date of founding in Roman numerals surround the image of an antique bust of the forward-and-backward-looking god Janus, who symbolizes the goals of an institution founded on a belief in the virtues of the classical past.

John Knight, *Il Diritto All'Ozio,* 1987, installation view, American Academy in Rome, Italy.

The meaning of *Il Diritto All'Ozio* depends on the use of the American Academy's emblem on the fabric of the lounge chairs to create an overall field pattern of small circular forms that imbue the ordinary deck chairs with the look of a designer product. Once utilitarian common objects are thereby elevated to a high plane of monetary value by the sheer power of commercially motivated design. Not even the high-minded symbolism of the academy's emblem can withstand the implications of this appropriation. Once it has been incorporated into an abstract, decorative grid, the emblem per force resembles a designer monogram.

The marble plaque, incised with the title of the work in italicized Helvetica typeface, commonly used for commercial purposes, but alluding in format to ancient Roman inscriptions, sets the tone of the work while also acting as a site marker. Reminiscent of an inscription from a classical ruin, it verbally positions the work within the framework of a consumer culture in which value rests on status symbols rather than on actual time and labor. By means of their design pattern, the lounge chairs themselves comment on their own duality both as works of art—not far removed from stretched, painted canvases—and as fashionable commodities.

Despite the site-specific derivation of its inherent elements, *Il Diritto All'Ozio* may reinstate itself in other places. When exhibited in Rome on the luxuriant grounds of the American Academy, Knight treated the chairs as if they belonged to a hotel or country club. Each day, weather providing, they were arranged in a circle around a large Greco-Roman urn and at the close of the day they were withdrawn from view. Because of the associations with leisure built into the work, however, the chairs may be reinstalled in other exhibitions and contexts as long as they continue to underline their essential function as patio, deck, or beach furniture.

For a one-person exhibition at the Hoshour Gallery in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Knight took account of the sociopolitical conditions pertaining to the American Southwest. *Łeetsoii,* the title of the work, is the Navajo (Dineh) word for *yellow earth* and, by extension, for uranium, procured from the region for its many industrial and military uses. In its first manifestation at the Hoshour Gallery,[7] *Łeetsoii* assumed the form of a wall-to-wall carpet that fit the contours of the gallery's space exactly and that was subject to practical use. Because of the thickness of its

John Knight, *Łeetsoii,* installation view, Hoshour Gallery, Albuquerque, 1987.

Antron nylon pile, it made material reference to the carpeting of corporate lobbies as much as it alluded to other types of floor sculpture that might be placed within an art context.

Although physically contained within the gallery, *Łeetsoii* linked itself with the broader cultural situation by means of large, overscaled, turquoise de/signs, which have been interwoven at regular intervals into its reddish brown fabric. This geometric, turquoise shape, colored like the stones of Indian jewelry and embedded in the carpet as a decorative motif, is the symbol for uranium found on United States geological survey maps. The color of the carpet ground—"Colombia Red," taken directly from a chart of available colors—matches the terrain of the Southwest and also hints at the particular hue typical of much recent,

postmodern interior decor. The carpet as a total entity, moreover, presents itself as a commercially produced, twentieth-century variant of the handwoven, nineteenth-century rug that is replete with floral patterns. Once again, it is the de/sign as employed by Knight that ties the work of art in with the realities of commercial enterprise by simultaneously providing abstract form and symbolic meaning in lieu of improvised compositional elements or shapes.

Within the confines of the Hoshour Gallery, the carpet as a shaped object in its own right remained subordinate to the physical constraints of the architecture and maintained its purpose as a floor covering. Once it was extracted from these premises it became an enormous, magnified precious object, disproportionate with standard, collectible works of art. As a huge and now formally arbitrary object,[8] thus dislodged from its original setting, *Łeetsoii*—still carrying its associations with Persian rugs as well as with wall-to-wall carpeting—ironically proclaims its larger-than-life, unattached but free-wheeling definition as an uprooted archeological specimen and as a commodity that is "out of hand."[9]

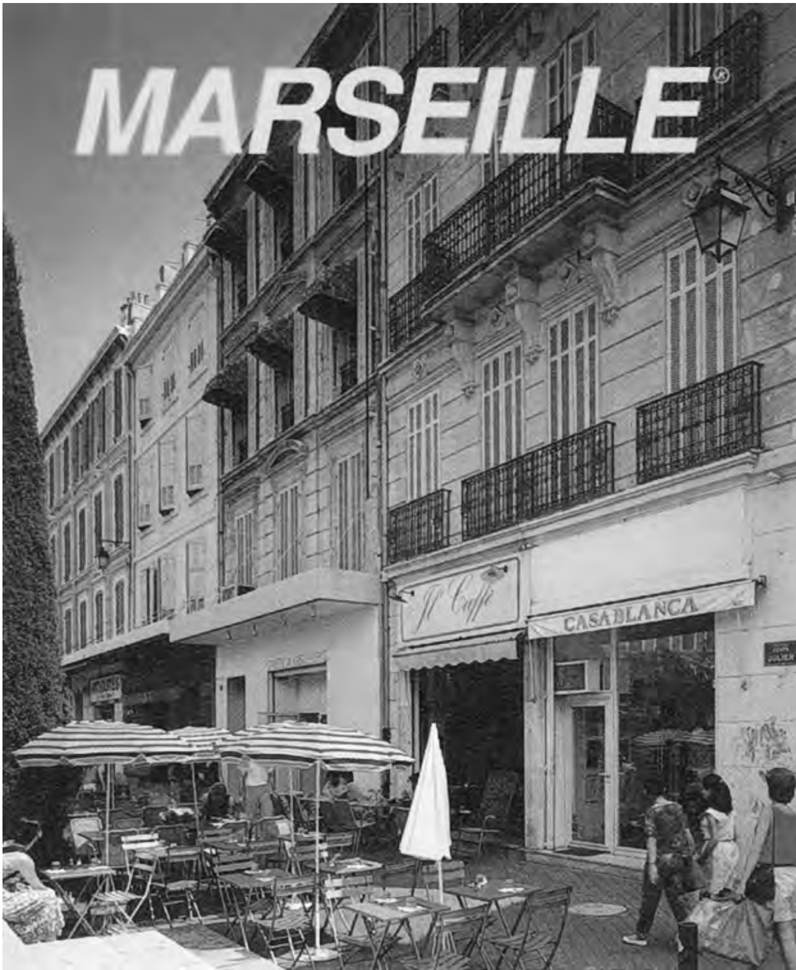
Knight's most recent work in the exhibition surveys the concurrent boundaries of art and commerce by yet other means. *Federal Style* (1989) brings relationships between works of art and territorial possession quite literally into relief in order to reveal their shared economic base. Some forty small, individual, copper-plated shapes and a large placard painted full scale on the exhibition wall with the words *Federal Style*—a double entendre referring to governmental practices in general as well as to the stylistic nomenclature for a specific period of American architecture and design—define the work as a whole. These individual, copper-plated units combined with the sign, whose upper half is lettered in black on a white ground and whose lower half is the reverse of this, jointly instill the work with political content. The uppercase, italicized Helvetica lettering, measuring nearly two meters in height and emphatically emblazoned on the wall, verbally supports the meaning of the copper-plated shapes, which encircled the entire space of the Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, where the work was first shown, and which were randomly dispersed on top of the sign's lettering when it was exhibited subsequently at the Richard Kuhlenschmidt Gallery, Los Angeles. Possessing irregular, jagged outlines, the copper-colored shapes are further marked by uneven and furrowed surfaces, engendered by the fact that Knight fabricated them out of commercially available, molded plastic

relief maps. Not unlike the ground plans at the center of the *Museotypes* plates, they are formally diversified on a purely abstract level of reading, yet the shape of each of the copper pieces precisely conforms to the geographical/topographical area of a different Indian reservation.[10]

Aligned on the wall like delicate fragments in a space lorded over by the black-and-white lettered sign or pinned to the sign like so many oddly shaped, dismembered parts, the copper shapes of *Federal Style* betoken their own nature as ornamental commodities affixed to the wall. As representations of vast land masses, shrunk to the scale of hand-graspable adornments, they critically harbor political intent and their metallic surface coating makes direct reference to lucrative mining ventures in the international, corporate quest for commercially viable, raw materials. In their delineation of those geographical areas that have been allotted to displaced, indigenous peoples in addition to their identification with semi-precious, jewel-like commodities, the copper forms poignantly point to the elision of large-scale enterprise with the production of consumer objects and to the exploitation and omission of the individual incurred in the process.

By alluding to the way in which possession for some results from the dispossession of others, *Federal Style* positions itself within the greater economic system. In opposite manner from Earthworks, conceived in relation to the open spaces of the physical landscape, Knight's work brings socially determined land masses into the gallery premises for scrutiny within the limits of the spaces reserved for art. However, although different from Earthworks or from pieces made on location within or without the exhibition space, *Federal Style* similarly answers to the definition of "site specificity" insofar as it places specific sites within museum or gallery confines by means of socially coded signs that are integral to the work's material formation.

As a work realized for the exhibition *Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, John Knight* at the Roger Pailhas Gallery, Marseille, just prior to *Federal Style* makes clear, Knight has continued to evolve methods for registering relationships between the work of art and contemporary culture through the implementation of signs. *Marque Déposée* (1988) takes the form of a mass-produced travel poster, although in actual fact it is a uniquely printed photograph taken by the artist.[11] This poster presents the Pailhas Gallery as it is to be seen within the context of the shops and cafés of its immediate neighborhood. Red, italicized, Helvetica Bold



John Knight, *Marque Déposée,* second version, 1989.

letters identify the city where the gallery is located as "Marseille," taking full advantage of this touristic city's romanticized associations. A small, encircled, and elided "JK" replaces the usual trademark. *Marque Déposée* thus functions like an actual, promotional sign but, furthermore, presents an image of its own site of display in the chic shopping district of Marseille. Whereas Knight's earlier "JK" reliefs collapse the real, mass-produced imagery of travel posters into authorial "signs" of uniqueness,

his Marseille piece, in reverse, mimics the attributes of mass-produced signs in the creation of a work whose uniqueness serves as a sign of its value as "art." As an imitation poster, therefore, *Marque Déposée* joins object, sign, and site in a single representation so as to cite within its own thematic framework the observable correlations between art and commercial activity.

With the aim of reinvesting the work of art with value as a critical tool, Knight has challenged its autonomy as a unique and precious object. Through the use of existing sign and design systems of representation such as language, logotypes, or mass media reproduction, works by Knight self-referentially comment on their place in the culture. At the same time, they illuminate aspects of the given social system, with which they are visibly and thematically united.

Notes

1. A note on the back of the card explains: "The color selection was taken from the Campbell's master bathroom tile."

2. Knight procured the floor plan from the real estate section of the *Los Angeles Times*.

3. On the occasion of the magazine's fiftieth issue, Knight produced a work for the 1988 spring volume of *Parachute* that correlates with *Journals Series*. Invited as one of twenty-five artists to create a work for the journal, Knight's contribution offered readers the possibility to purchase a subscription to *Parachute* that at the same time was a work of his. A note at the end of the editorial stated, "When the conversation turns to Art, open *Parachute*. See attached envelope for instructions on how to receive your Designer Subscription. John Knight, March 1, 1988." The magazine's usual subscription envelope was addressed to *Parachute*.

4. John Knight, quoted in Anne Rorimer, "On John Knight," in *John Knight,* exhibition catalog (Chicago: The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1983), n.p. Reprinted in this volume.

5. Because the glass used for Knight's mirrors is coated with tin on the surface, not on the back of the glass's thickness, the image the mirrors are reflecting is hardly distorted.

6. Namely, Knight has used the logotypes of the following companies: Sumitomo Chemical Co., Ltd., Osaka, Japan; the United Shoe Machinery Corporation, USA; The Rochester Institute of Technology, New York. The logotypes were used for reasons of their formal adaptability to mirrors.

7. For a more in-depth discussion of this work exhibited in Albuquerque see Edward Bryant, "John Knight: Hoshour Gallery," *Flash Art,* no. 141 (Summer 1988): 139.

8. By pure coincidence, its overall form resembles that of a doll from Indochina.

9. Subsequent to its presentation at the Hoshour Gallery, *Łeetsoii* was exhibited in *Magiciens de la Terre,* organized by the Centre Georges Pompidou/Musée Nationale d' Art Moderne, Paris, May 18–August 14, 1989.

10. Knight drew the outlines of these shapes from a road map published by the US Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, locating the existing Indian reservations.

11. For an analysis of this work in relation to John Knight's *Une vue culturelle* (1987), shown at the Maison de la Culture et de la Communication, Saint-Etienne, France, see Claude Gintz, "John Knight: From Site Specificity to Site Reflexiveness," in *John Knight: Une vue culturelle*, exhibition catalog, ed. Yves Aupetitallot (Saint-Etienne: Maison de la Culture et de la Communication de Saint-Etienne, 1987), 5–16.

On John Knight's Journals Work

Dan Graham

Mid- to late 1960s' "Conceptual art" dealt with design in a number of ways. For example, I dealt with the two-dimensional magazine page in my 1964–1967 pieces (documented in *For Publication*, published by the Otis Art Institute Gallery). Claes Oldenburg's 1964 *Bedroom Ensemble* dealt with the mass-produced domestic interior that, when exhibited in an art gallery, brought into perspective the oddness of the gallery space as half-showroom and half-office. On Kawara's mailed postcard series, *I GOT UP,* begun in 1968, involved picture postcards with commercially produced views showing scenes where Kawara was staying. Kawara rubber-stamped on each card the exact time when he woke up and mailed a small number of cards to a selected list of people—each receiving a daily sequence of cards.

What was radically new in John Knight's *Journals Series* was its contextualization (only) within the private, domestic interior of the stereotypical house. Knight's *Journals Series* concerns gift subscriptions to popular, "middle class" magazines mailed to the homes of nearly one hundred people without prior knowledge of the recipients. This piece, begun in 1977, continues through the present. In cases in which the people and their homes are known to the artist, there is a deliberate attempt to match, contradict, or subtly influence these recipients' lifestyles or domestic habits/tastes through the selection of a particular magazine as a gift. Some of the periodicals mailed were *Sports lllustrated* (to this writer), *Popular Mechanics*, *US*, *Arizona Highways*, *New West,* and *Better Homes and Gardens*.

Knight perceives the magazine as a collected object that becomes precious for two reasons: first, it is received as an "artwork" from the artist, and second, "well-made," nicely designed magazines become objects that are kept for a period of time before being disposed of or placed in the storage room. "Their covers are made to fit into the decor of a conventional house environment, an environment which a number of these magazines already deal with as content (for instance, *Metropolitan Home* or *Better Homes and Gardens*). It is an artwork that can take up space in the architecture otherwise impossible for the conventional artwork to occupy—the bathroom, the garage, for instance. It uses those aspects of the architecture that already have in their interior design a coffee table, magazine rack or bedside table."[1]

Knight's work, by foregrounding the penetration of the private sphere of home life by the subliminal design package, adopts a distanced, philosophical-ethical view of this phenomenon. This is unlike the currently popular Baudrillardian position that sees everything as a simulation by which "the slightest details of our behavior are ruled by neutralized, indifferent . . . signs . . . a simulacrum which dominates (everything)."[2]

Magazines are "designed as packages which, due to their visuals, . . . habitually change a person's life-schedule."[3] *Journals Series,* notes Knight, is itself "as fascist in intention as the periodical is designed, in its 'normal' sense, to be." Magazines are "objects that are 'pre-fabricated,' and are common parts of the environment in a semiological sense. They are designed in such a way that they can't be thrown away. Instead of being a 'ready-made,' the receiver has to deal with the magazine's (written/pictorial) content."[4] In a sense, magazines—especially their covers—are subliminally planted in the home, like the pods in the 1950s Don Siegel film, *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* where they implant "new design ideas" that are purchasable in the form of commodities by the millions of their readers.

The November 1983 issue of the glossy coffee-table periodical *The World of Interiors* features a photo essay, "Kunsthaus," on a successful German artist's home. The large caption head reads: "The interior of Karlheinz Scherer's German home is subjected to the same discipline as his painting, a constant reducing and stripping away, to leave only the bare essentials. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that *it has become a work of art*. . . . The environment he has created inside the old house corresponds with and modifies his paintings."

Tear sheet, furniture advertisement from *Abitare,* September 1981.

Here a magazine spread that is meant to convince the readers that they, in redesigning their house, can be creating works of art on a par with a famous German artist is *also* creating a market for the paintings of Mr. Scherer within beautifully designed homes like his. But it is not only artworks that are contextually validated by being reproduced in glossy magazines within "designed interiors" but architecture itself, which is now designed to be photographed and reproduced in lush architectural design–style magazines. Just as the cover and the glossy color pages of slick magazines are meant to be part of and to influence the interior design/furnishings of their readers, so the architecture—seen first in photo form (two-dimensionalization of "real," architectonic space)—often plays off its dual existence as a form to be viewed *on site* as well as reproduced in a magazine situated within domestic space. Architecture influenced by its potential reproducibility seems to shift interchangeably between two- and three-dimensionality. Such architecture, in its "cardboard" qualities, foregrounds the idea that any architectonic, three-dimensional form can be (hypothetically) constructed from an arbitrary logic, such as that used in computer-generated, "hyperspace" video graphics.

Notes

1. John Knight in conversation with the author, 1980.
2. Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," *Art and Text,* no. 11 (September 1983): 3–47.
3. John Knight, note 1.
4. Ibid.

Knight's Moves: Situating the Art/Object

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

> The entire world of art has reached such a low level, it has been commercialized to such a degree that art and everything relating to it has become one of the most trivial activities of our epoch. Art in these times has probably reached one of its lowest points ever in its history, probably even lower than in the late eighteenth century when there was no great art but only frivolity. Art in the twentieth century has come to a similar function as a mere entertainment, as though we were living in an amusing period, in spite of all the wars that we have experienced as part of our setting.
>
> —Marcel Duchamp[1]

Until recently, the work of John Knight has appeared strangely obscure to American audiences. Perhaps this is because of his West Coast location, his informed orientation toward the ideas and practices of particular European artists of the 1960s (like Piero Manzoni), and his early studies in architecture. Yet, although Knight changed his focus from architecture to art, the spatial context of beings and objects—with their placement and shifts, their movements and functions—remains central to his concerns as an artist. This architectural grounding might, in part, account for the range of questions posited in Knight's work—questions that might initially appear peripheral to the traditional conception of art as the autonomous, discursive production of objects.

Knight's work addresses framing (literally and metaphorically), presentation and display, the intersection of visible and invisible support

systems, and the often disturbing parallels and interferences between high art's presumed autonomy and other discursive practices upon which it might depend (e.g., the language and the products of design); or those that, in turn, might result from its activities (e.g., advertising strategies). His work came into its own in the mid-1970s when economic, institutional, and critical attention shifted gradually away from the complexity and radicality of Minimal and Post-Minimal sculpture and the Conceptual work of the late 1960s. Although this work provided the primary historical context for Knight's first activities, artists of the early 1960s, such as Richard Artschwager, Claes Oldenburg, and Edward Ruscha, were also of considerable importance to his development. In the early 1970s Post-Conceptual artists like Michael Asher and Dan Graham were to become his friends. The shift of the mid-1970s constituted a massive restoration of what had appeared only a decade before as historically obsolete positions and practices in painting and sculpture. Within a very short time a new generation of collectors and critics, curators and artists, would successfully disguise this new amnesia as a form of historical commemoration.

It was in part because of this drastic shift that the Post-Conceptual work of Knight's generation would only gradually become known, because its positions were generally associated with the spectrum of Conceptual art. The work of this generation then expanded the concerns and positions of the artist of the 1960s and attempted to transcend critically the historical limitations of these practices as they had gradually become apparent. As John Knight once phrased it, "At one point I recognized that these artists were racing into a corner and since I was a little behind them and could see the mistakes all the more easily, I could devise strategies to avoid them."[2]

Knight's critique initiated a reversal of the terms in which the Conceptual movement had defined its most radical positions. It had been one of the paradoxes of Conceptual art that although it emphasized its universal availability and its potential collective accessibility, and underlined its freedom from the determinations of the discursive and economic framing conventions governing traditional art production and reception, it was, nevertheless, perceived as the most esoteric and elitist artistic mode precisely because of its elusive character, its linguistic status, and its explicit alignment with analytic philosophy. As with the heroic phases of nonrepresentational art, the intentions of Conceptual art were

diametrically opposed to the conditions it actually generated when entering the culture. Although aiming at universal comprehension, it generated elitist and exclusionary readings, reducing its definition of art to the analytical propositions and investigation of the relationships that determine the perceptual conventions of interpreting a visual construct; it ended up as the quintessentially self-referential and nonrepresentational practice. Although aiming at the transgression and rigorous exclusion of traditional categories it soon became the justification and rationale for reestablishing new academic versions of the artistic production that would haunt European and American art of the 1980s.

These problems, discovered in Conceptual practice by Knight's generation, obviously were not the same difficulties institutions and collectors had experienced in the instability of the work's distribution form: the manifest and deliberate lack of a comforting aesthetic surplus springing inevitably from the deployment of traditional materials and production procedures, and the absence of a marketable auratic object. By contrast, Knight's critique of the Conceptual legacy focused on precisely the aspect that had been one of its most pertinent achievements: the transformation of the aesthetic object into a linguistic structure. Whereas the general response to this feature seems to have been one of deprivation in the face of aesthetic withdrawal, Knight's claims for the necessity to rematerialize the object were motivated by the need to reincorporate other functions of representation into the artistic structure—for example, the representational practices of decoration and design, and the techniques of display and presentation in advertising and architecture. Knight perceives the aesthetic construct to be inextricably intertwined with these functions and discursive practices. It seemed necessary to take an approach impure by comparison to the purist definition of the aesthetic object of Conceptual art, and that impurity would have to defy the rigorous and self-imposed limitations of Conceptualism's version of Modernist self-referentiality.

Whereas Conceptual art had generally acknowledged its indebtedness to Duchamp and the ready-made model, it now seemed increasingly important to acknowledge that to the same extent that aesthetic conventions determined artistic reflection, the languages of mass cultural representation now determined aesthetic production and reception, regardless of their explicit awareness or disavowal of these conditions. Thus, for example, the artificial opposition between mass cultural representation in

Pop art and the programmatic elision of that representation in Minimal and Conceptual art was by now considered to be a moot point. Therefore, Knight's work would insist on a reflection of the actual object conditions a Conceptual work (like every other work of art) would inevitably acquire upon its entry into the culture, addressing the dialectic that awaits the aesthetic object once it has left its discursive space and has entered the institutional space of the museum, the economic space of the gallery, and finally the space of consumption and use in the private home or the corporate collection.

The Status of the (Art) Object

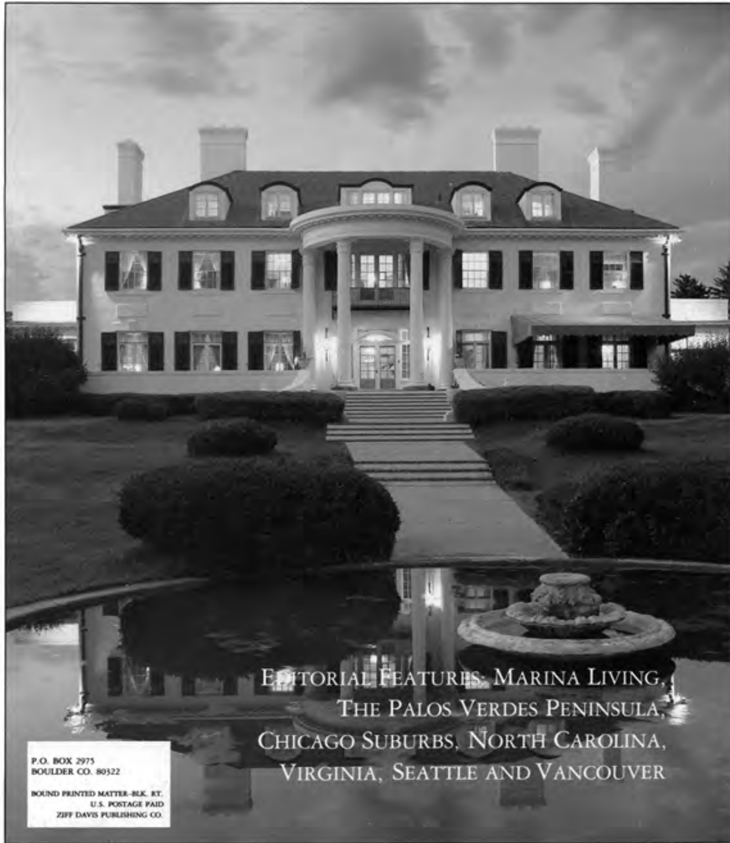
Knight's work dissociates itself critically from another legacy of the art of the 1960s, its often rather simplistic rediscovery and reconstitution of the Duchampian ready-made model as it occurred in the context of Pop art. His work not only critically resists that legacy but it also pronounces implicit skepticism on certain current practices that reinstate the familiar through sudden, seemingly radical acts of altering it. In Knight's work the dialectic of mass cultural representation and its high cultural counterparts is not resolved by simple acts of estranging the familiar object in order to assert the supreme validity of the high art system. In fact, his work refuses to function simply as yet another hybrid in the ideological panoply or as contemporary art that has amalgamated proudly the techniques of the culture industry, adjusting to its modes of distribution and assimilated its methods of meaning production. Yet, it simultaneously remains conservative in its concern about its place in the apparatus of high culture, whose functions and structure, whose institutional and economic *form,* it never questions in spite of its declamatory assault on the *image* of culture.

Knight's work perpetually questions *both* parameters within which aesthetic objects constitute meaning and generate reading. Like all work that inscribes itself in the now distant yet ever-present tradition of Duchamp's ready-made, it suspends the utilitarian dimension of the object to the same degree that it imbues the mute mass cultural object with a discursive dimension. Yet, unlike most of the recent epigones of that endless repetition of the radical gesture of altering exhausted discursive conventions, Knight moves beyond a simple repetition of that paradigm. His work questions the viability of the ready-made concept under

the circumstances of a historical situation that is as marked by the transformation of the ready-made strategy into a convenient rhetorical trope for decorators as it is defined by a collective relationship to objects that has altogether shifted to the object's semiotic dimension of sign exchange value.

This paroxysm of the object experience delineates the space in which Knight's objects function, and his *Journals Series,* initiated in 1977 and still continuing, embodies his strategies to operate within these conditions.[3] It consists of an apparently random (but actually rather carefully chosen) sample of friends, colleagues, collectors, curators, and critics, who each receive a prepaid subscription to a particular journal, selected specifically for the individual recipient. The subscriptions are imposed on these recipients without prior notification, consultation, or consent, nor are they given an explanation of the overall purpose of the enterprise: a journal such as *Antiques World* was sent to one of the most important Pop artists; *Unique Homes* went to a Belgian collector; *Soviet Life* reached a contemporary critic. Although these selections appear random at first, they actually establish an ambiguous semblance of correspondence to the receiver's presumed personal interests and identity. Perhaps the selection principle has as one of its antecedents the random manner by which Piero Manzoni selected individuals, in whole or in part, to be designated as works of art for limited or indefinite periods of time; or perhaps it derives from the random manner that seems to have determined the selection of recipients of On Kawara's postcard and telegram series, which he has sent to numerous individuals since 1968 and 1970 respectively.

Journals Series destabilizes conventions of both the production and the reception of the art object by dismantling first of all the very artistic convention from which it descends: Duchamp's ready-made model (a feature that almost all of the "new" assemblage works by younger artists lack, either as a result of conceptual simplicity, ignorance, or market opportunism). It is now well known that Duchamp's ready-mades depended not only on the suspension of an object's utilitarian functions but equally on the placement of that object into the peculiar intersection of institutional space (the frame or the wall, declaring every object within its confines—through institutional power and convention—to be an object of aesthetic experience) and discursive space (where linguistic conventions arrange experience for contemplation and memory, the space of perceptual reflection and cognition). Whereas Knight's declaration of the

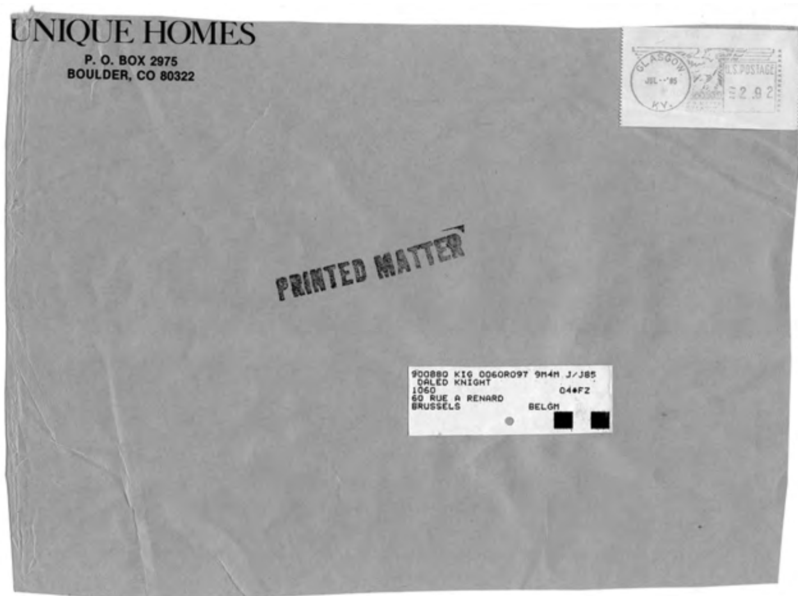


John Knight, *Journals Series*, 1977–, detail. Courtesy: Herman Daled, Brussels.

Journals as a "work" inevitably differentiates the magazines as art objects in the manner of a ready-made, they nevertheless continue to operate within their traditionally assigned object functions and space (to sit on a table or shelf as reading or display material), available for both consumptive use and aesthetic contemplation. However, the *Journals* differ from the traditional ready-made by being, from the outset, already "discursive" objects rather than functional objects; they are reproductions and representations of objects. These journals speak of fashion, interior design, architecture, and taste—discourses that border on the aesthetic experience or may become congruent with it. By definition and placement, these journals now enter into the discursive conventions of the art object, establishing a parallel between the two systems, which becomes all the more visible when they are chosen for an exhibition or when they are suddenly treated by their owner as works of art.

But Knight's *Journals Series* employs further strategies to invert the conventions of reception by replacing the act of individual choice and selection with a form of aesthetic *octroi*. Traditionally, aesthetic judgment and taste determine the attraction and devotion of the amateur and historian, critic and collector, and only the criteria of artistic and historical merit or a personal emotional, psychological investment determine the choice. By blurring the boundaries between choice and imposition, *Journals Series* interferes with the aesthetic object's supposedly distinct spheres of private and public. Knight's *Journals Series* (as an unsolicited public mass cultural object) intrudes into the private sphere, and thereby reverses the traditional fate of the essentially public art object to disappear into the private sphere as the object of possession. Moreover, Knight's work reverses the artist's traditional role by becoming a sponsor of the collector's property. Rather than being chosen himself as an object of institutional or private collecting, in *Journals Series* it is the artist who actively chooses the recipients of the work by arranging a subscription to a particular journal he deems adequate and by offering it to its future owner without receiving the owner's prior consent.

The effects of this inversion are evident in an anecdote about a very conscientious collector who suddenly received an unsolicited subscription to a magazine and returned all of the issues in protest against what he perceived to be an intrusion on his privacy. On learning that these intrusive magazines were, in fact, sponsored by John Knight as a work, he became anxious to retrieve those issues in order to obtain the full run of the series and reconstitute the work.



John Knight, *Journals Series,* 1977–, detail. Courtesy: Herman Daled, Brussels.

But the relationship between the private and the public is reversed in yet another, possibly even more consequential manner. The art object traditionally registers projections of identity (individual, cultural, national, ethnic, or class-based). Paradoxically, the experience of identity is mediated by an act of reification, an act in which parts of the self are invested in the object's receiving the projected image of that identity like a mirror. *Journals Series* subverts these expectations to function as an object mediating the experience of identity. It is through this artificial construction of identity by approximation that the implicit claim to constitute and mirror identity—made by the artistic object as much as by the demands upon it—becomes evidently grotesque. It is even more effective because the journals, as discursive objects in themselves, practice the provision of identity in neatly segmented divisions of needs and desire. They reveal the extent to which the individual's claim for identity is always the subject of manageable and constructed systems of signs,

containing and structuring individual needs according to the strategies of consumption.

In this context it becomes most evident why and how *Journals Series* has departed from a mere repetition of the ready-made model. As Jean Baudrillard has observed, the process of fetishization no longer occurs primarily in human relations to actual objects, but rather in the ideological containment of individual desire within the sign itself. If aesthetic practice claims to be a negation and resistance against the very act and condition of the fetishization of needs, the mere application of the traditional ready-made strategy fails even to recognize the actual historical conditions within which it operates. If, in fact, Duchamp's ready-made model was appropriate for the situation in which it emerged, then it would certainly be aesthetic naiveté to now substitute the mass cultural object for that of high culture, assuming that a critical dimension would open up inevitably in that reversal. The one-way street of assemblage aesthetics (either of Pop art or the most recent version of it from the Lower East Side) fails precisely in those terms. It rejuvenates high art iconography by slumming through mass cultural imagery, providing an audience sensorially fatigued by the sublimity of neoexpressive figuration with the shock of the mass cultural object. The purported aesthetic radicalization (as though a Japanese transistor radio or a rubber mask were conceptually any more radical than a urinal or a typewriter cover was seventy years ago) conceals the profoundly conservative attitude of these strategies with regard to the inherent dialectics of the high art system and its ideological functions. From its inception, the shock value of these current objects was tailored to slide right into the stable conventions of the institution and the discursive order of art—the museum, the collection, the market. Although they pretend to engage in a critical annihilation of mass cultural fetishization, they reinforce the fetishization of the high cultural object even more: not a single discursive frame is undone, not a single aspect of the support systems is reflected, not one institutional device is touched upon.

By contrast, Knight's *Journals Series* initiates an almost infinite series of interferences in these discursive conventions, once the work enters the traditional institutional context. These ruptures are concretized in the actual difficulties the journals pose in terms of their possible display and installation and the various conflicting readings their presentation alone can generate. Are they objects of primary aesthetic information or

are they supplements, like catalogs, posters, and brochures accompanying an exhibition? If they are primary rather than supplementary, whose determination transformed them? Are they pictorial objects or sculptural objects (i.e., should we contemplate the variety of the representations on the covers of a series or simply a serial stack)? Should they be encased as art objects, and with their newly acquired value thus be protected from use; or should the magazines remain accessible for potential readers? Where does their value reside: in the function that they can exert or in the aesthetic dimension that they have acquired, once properly exhibited? Can they change owners, or are they personalized to such an extent that their polemical destruction of any pretense to subjective identity would be deleted if they were removed from the condition of original ownership? Would this removal then destroy their aesthetic identity?

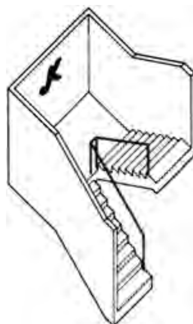
Authorship and Ownership

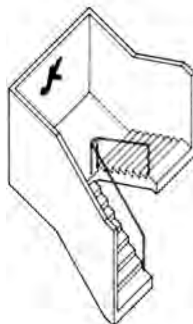
In 1982, John Knight designed eight identically sized logo-typographical elements, for a site-specific installation at documenta 7 in Kassel, four of which were placed on each of the four landings of the two main staircases in the exhibition building. The choice of a deliberately marginal space for the installation of these elements complemented the provocative evacuation of aesthetic information from these signs and their formal reduction to the mere initials of his name. The capital letters *J* and *K* were contracted into a ligature and enlarged to wooden logotype reliefs, such as one might find on the facade of a building or in the lobby of a corporation.

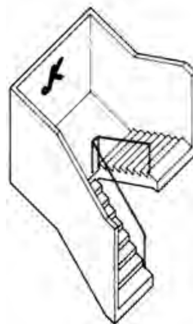
These reliefs offered only one additional feature, because each of the eight elements was wrapped and almost entirely covered by a different printed color reproduction of a photograph: travel posters for various countries in seven instances, and in one case a poster to advertise the services of a California bank. Although the images of these posters were constantly fragmented, they still conveyed, by their technique of photographic reproduction and by their lush imagery, their original function of lure and seduction.

This work addresses the question of *authorship* with the same rigor that *Journals Series* applied to the *ownership* of the art object, because it subjects the entire formal structure to the performance and display of the author's signature. The ligature of the initials has submerged all formal

John Knight, *Project for documenta 7,* 1982, isometric installation drawing.







and visual possibilities that the category of a relief once had. In fact, Knight's reliefs seem to take the Cubist legacy literally and restore some of its original radicality through the rigid juxtaposition of linguistic sign and visual form, of mass-cultural representation and self-referential artistic object. In its self-imposed restriction to a template or stenciled formal structure, the work establishes an equally surprising radicalization of the pictorial strategy that Jasper Johns had introduced into American art in the early 1950s, where the template of the flag, the target, or the number seemingly precluded all further formal variation and compositional play. Yet here the template is multiplied and serialized rather than a paradoxical pictorial original.

The presence of the signature—that sign that supposedly guarantees the authenticity of authorship and therefore assumes inevitably the functions of a trademark to vouch for the originality of a commodity—has been a focal point of artistic reflection since the beginning of Modernism (e.g., Manet's constant play with the signature's incompatibility with other pictorial representations). But it is only in the second half of the twentieth century that it becomes the actual figure or the subject of a pictorial construct itself, as in a series of paintings by Robert Ryman from the early 1960s, in which the signature assumes a place of prominence coexisting with the actual facture of the painting's brush marks, where it will eventually become the "figure" of the painting altogether. Thus, the facture of the pictorial sign in Modernism is caught between a transcendental movement and a declaration of commercial warranty, as Yve-Alain Bois remarks in a brilliant observation of this problem in the context of early twentieth-century abstraction.[4] In art from the later 1960s, the signature as trademark of authorship assumes the position of an exclusive figure and of primary visual information, as in the neon signs by Robert Watts from around 1966, and it appears in the plaques by Marcel Broodthaers between 1969 and 1972. It is also evident in at least one work by Jannis Kounellis from 1971 (which spells the artist's name in small gas flames) and in various neon pieces by Luciano Fabro from the same period, which identify the artist's name and address. All these works make the signature their subject in a tautological movement typical of the Conceptual approach of the late 1960s.

In their programmatic devotion to the design of corporate anonymity (Knight chose italicized Helvetica because it represents what he calls "the ultimate mainstream corporate font"), John Knight's logotypes

anticipate the fate all Modernist reductivist abstraction has had to face in its history. Whether it was the utopianism of architecture or typography and design, it was inevitably "incorporated" into the needs of the postwar ideologies of accelerated and enforced consumption. After all, that is one of the dialectical features in the historical legacy of Modernist abstraction: to have set out as the sign system of a radical social utopia and to have ended up as the agent of the totalizing claims of profit maximization. The utopia of abstraction became the basic (de)sign system for the dissemination of the ideology and the products of corporate postwar culture.

Knight's series of logotypes is suspended between the historical dilemma of its proper discursive formation (that all forms of extreme self-reflexivity and semiotic self-purification of pictorial signs were transformed into pure commodity propaganda) and the current reality of the institutional system in which the display of a mythical foundation of subjectivity and the author's authentic creativity are transformed into the evident subject of myth and spectacle.

As in *Journals Series,* these reliefs interrelate and interfere with parallel discursive practices. The fragmented photographic imagery of tourism hinges viewers' quest for pure aesthetic experience on similar quests for the new and the exotic, the alien and the Other. Simultaneously, the artist's monogram, supposedly the most personal and reliable "authorization" of a work, is linked to the anonymous display systems that identify the corporate megastructure.

Once again, the logotypes reverse the order of private and public: the most individual and supposedly unique feature of the artist becomes incorporated in an anonymous design, whereas the audience's demand for the innermost revelation of an authentic and individual aesthetic truth receives its response in the language of public and collective mythology.

The aesthetic vacuity of the reliefs accounts for the critical force of the work, but it is in the concrete and specific placement in both the architectural and discursive context of this particular exhibition that the work gained its destabilizing momentum. Voluntarily marginalized in the staircases of an exhibition devoted to the renewed and reinforced celebration of traditional notions of authorship and originality, Knight's work accompanied viewers on their way up or down through the spectacular display of an infinite variety of artistically authentic and individual

John Knight, *Project for documenta 7,* 1982, installation view, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany.

revelations. The logotypes operated as an unwarranted and impertinent subtext to that official message, especially because they had not been incorporated into the main spaces of the exhibition. As a subtext of the repressed discursive legacy, they spoke of the past failures of Modernist promises, the latent conditions of its currently renewed projects, and its future functions as the helpless object of possession and as the powerless decoration of the corporate wall.

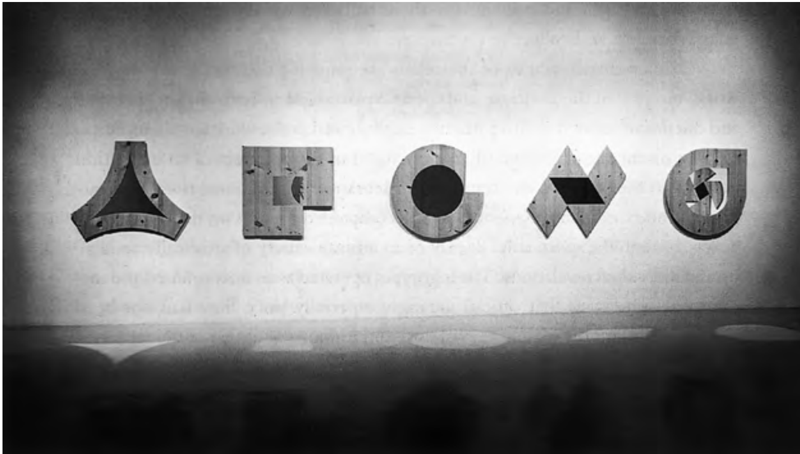
Mirror Series

Knight's most recent work, *Mirror Series* (1986–), integrates features of both *Journals Series* and the logotypes in an uneasy synthesis (the vacuity and blandness of the former and the rigorous corporate design of the latter). In the same way, it brackets the discursive space of Modernist geometric abstraction (and, by implication, the current efforts of its revitalization or attempts at petty parody) with the two social spaces of the future destinations of contemporary art: the corporate and the domestic collections (the institutional space of the museum increasingly functioning as a space of legitimization and discursive validation vouching for the

product's economic reliability). The use of mirrors in the new series inscribes the work inevitably (as with the logotype series, in terms of its design and display conventions) in a long history of the deployment of a material device, which, in its quasi-mechanically produced self-reflexivity and its instantaneous display of pure index signs, performs a profoundly adversarial and subversive role directed against the manually crafted self-reflexivity of the Modernist pictorial sign.

The mirror, as an archaic optical device, is as far from the painted picture plane as it is close to the optical instrument or the mechanical vision of the camera. Its constant, instant capacity to reduce the image to a zero degree of representation has made it throughout the history of Western painting the *instrument* and the iconic subject of the painter's craft and of pictorial depiction. Yet, with the same obsession that the mirror has been depicted as the metaphor of painting, it has had to be avoided as the painter's actual *material* surface.

It is not at all coincidental that the first use of this material occurs in a historical context that not only dismantled the conventions of pictorial representation but also discovered, rather rapidly, that the substitution of abstract geometric formations for the obsolete figurative formations had its own historical limitations and shortcomings, recognizing that



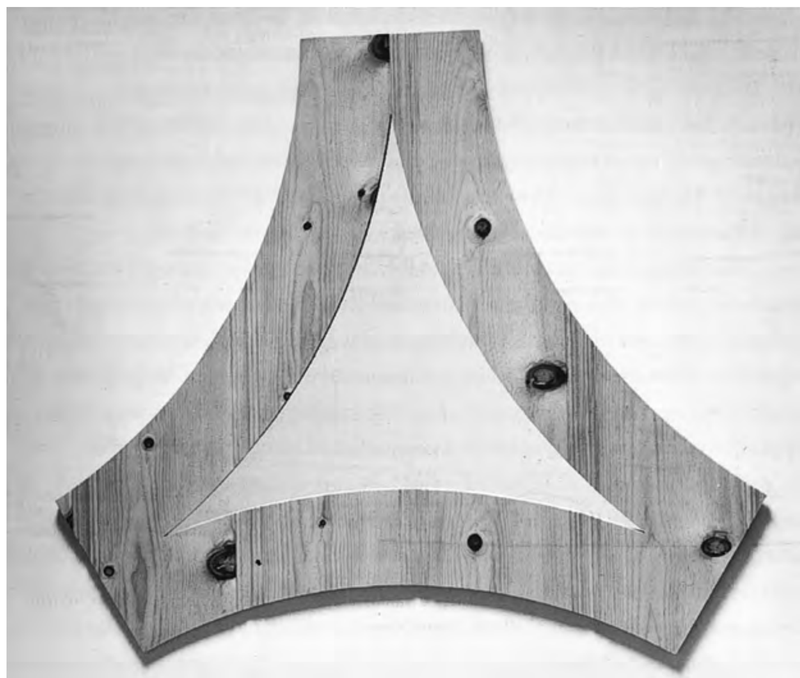
John Knight, *Mirror Series,* 1986–, installation view, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 1986. Courtesy: The artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio.

the triumph of nonrepresentational art was a necessarily short-lived developmental phase. Thus, the proposal to employ mirrored materials and surfaces occurs in several instances between 1919 and 1922, during the period when the newly established convention of Post-Cubist geometric abstraction is radically criticized and transcended by Marcel Duchamp and the artists of the Post-Suprematist Soviet avant-garde.[5] Then, after a considerable absence (a result of the general postwar excitement about the liberated and liberating experience of pigment dispersal), this profoundly disturbing material appears again. It responds to both a crisis of representational conventions and the increasingly obvious inability of nonrepresentational pictorial and sculptural structures to resolve this crisis—as, for example, in the early 1960s context of Minimal art, particularly in the work of Robert Morris, and simultaneously (or slightly later) in the work of Larry Bell on the West Coast.

Transformed and enlarged in the work of Dan Graham in the mid- to late 1970s (e.g., *Two Adjacent Pavilions,* 1978–1982), the mirrored surface now functions simultaneously as a device of instant visual feedback to generate audience consciousness and participation, quite as much as it is still linked with the architectural idiom of the International Style's glass curtain walls. These have become the mirrored veils of a corporate architecture, attempting to appear as a transparent and publicly accessible structure, as Graham has pointed out in his writings.

Knight's *Mirror Series* inverts that heroic step in Graham's work to construct a truly public sculpture; it reintroduces the material into the explicitly discourse-oriented format of the gallery object, without, however, giving up on its established link to the languages of corporate design. Suspended between the design codes of the domestic utilitarian or decorative object, and the design codes of corporate identity, Knight's work keeps the discourse on the geometric tradition of nonrepresentational painting in check. Once again, as was the case with *Journals Series,* the work's categorical instability affects the stable conventions of the objects of its surroundings. *Mirror Series* confronts these most efficiently when the mirrors are actually placed in their intended site: a site that is defined by a more or less controlled mingling of architectural spaces and surfaces, by the jumble of objects designed for utilitarian functions and objects whose function it is to be designed, that accumulation of discrete, separate, aesthetic constructs, each "holding" or "defending" its space, marking its "territory," the site of the art collection. The elements

of *Mirror Series* maintain at all times and under all contextual circumstances their subversive allusions to potential use value and the connotations of their domestic functions. We know they are not regular mirrors: they are oversized and their front surface coating makes them unusually brilliant. Yet no one can resist being caught in a quick exchange with the reflection of the self, that utilitarian release from the demand of the aesthetic offered by the visual trap of the mirror; it can occur even in the mere reflection of a glass pane covering any work of art. These mirrors bring considerable discomfort upon all other objects surrounding them, objects solely devoted to aesthetic contemplation. The mere presence of the dimension of use value has threatened and fascinated the Modernist pictorial construct at least as much as, if not more than, the magic object's functions. Beginning in Cubist painting, for example, this dimension appears in the illusionistically painted functional device of the nail that keeps the painting on the wall.



John Knight, *Mirror Series,* 1986–, detail. Courtesy: The artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

The instability of conventional, categorical, and spatial borders in Knight's work points to the threshold that has provoked the greatest departures in the twentieth century. Those who survived the adventure of crossing these thresholds almost always returned not as productivists, but as designers with their hands full of products.

The territorial instability of Knight's work (the mirrors are equally homeless in the corporate lobby, the living room, and on the museum wall) points incessantly to that necessary transition and shifting from one social sphere to the other: from the private collection as the site of intimate individual cultural identity to its complementary opposite, the public sphere, where art is destined to function as the site of public knowledge and commemoration, of public exchange and free circulation. In its shift, the work proves that there exists neither sphere nor any given space in which the aesthetic construct could presently fulfill any of these public or private functions without instantly falsifying both. The corporate logotypes framing Knight's mirrors continually remind us of the ultimate corporate reality that controls and determines the most secluded interior reflection. In the same manner, the trivial domesticity of the mirrors leaves no doubt that the aesthetic withdrawal from its public social function has no other place than that of the private framed reflex.

Notes

1. Marcel Duchamp, quoted in Herbert Molderings, "Zwischen Atelier und Ausstellung," in *Sarkis: Kriegsschatz*, exhibition catalog (Münster: Westfälischer Kunstverein, 1978).

2. John Knight in conversation with the author, November 1986.

3. For a discussion of John Knight's work to which my essay is indebted in many ways, see Anne Rorimer, "On John Knight," in *John Knight,* exhibition catalog (Chicago: The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1983), n.p.; reprinted in this volume. On the journals, see also Dan Graham, "On John Knight's Journals Work," *Journal: A Contemporary Art Magazine* 4, no. 40 (Fall 1984): 110–111. Reprinted in this volume.

4. Yve-Alain Bois, "Malevich, le carré, le degré zéro," *Macula* 1 (August 1976): 37.

5. For a more developed discussion of the use of mirrors in sculpture, see my essay "Construire (l'histoire de) la sculpture," in *Qu'est-ce que la sculpture moderne,* ed. Margit Rowell (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1986), 254–274. [Parts of this essay were published as "Cold War Constructivism," in *Reconstructing Modernism*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 85–110.—Ed.].

On John Knight

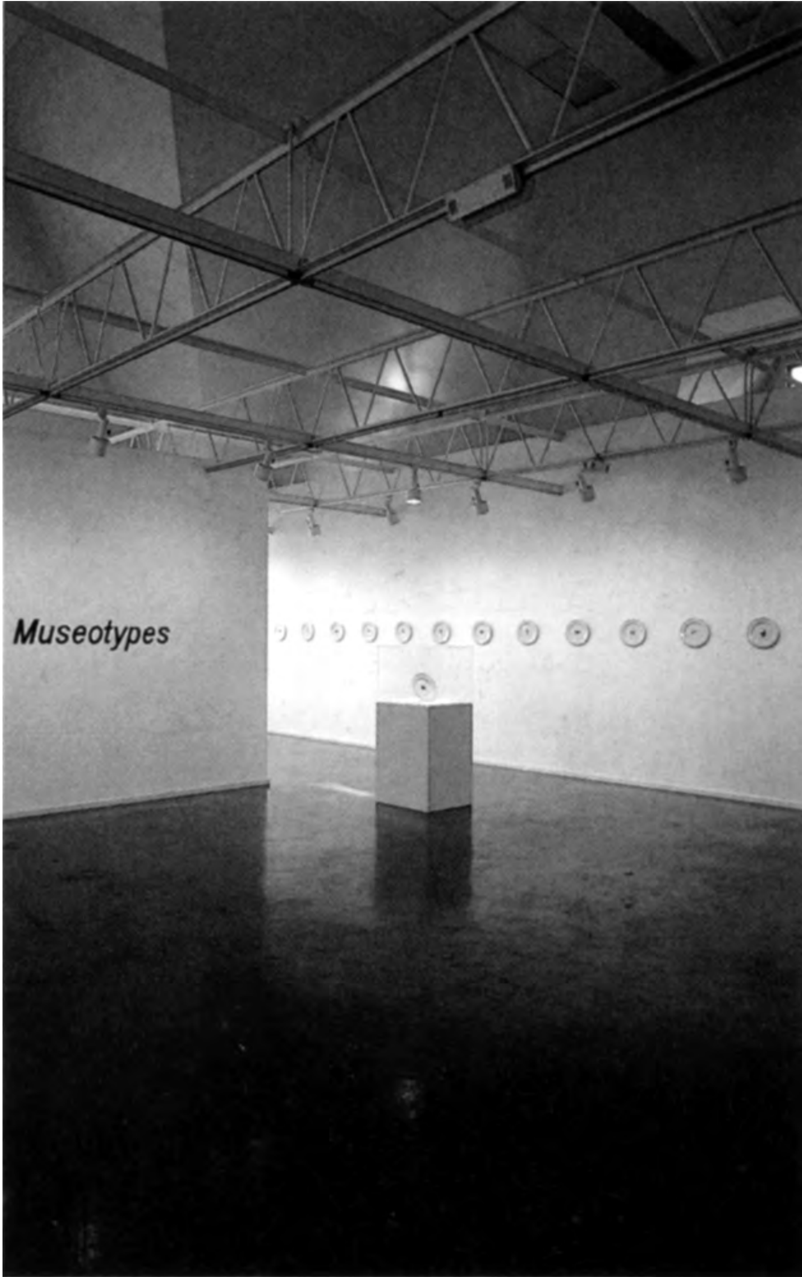
Anne Rorimer

> The collection of a man's trade-mark designs may well be the measure of his proficiency as an artist.
>
> —Harry L. Gage, 1930[1]

The art of John Knight successfully eludes stereotypical categorization. Each work assumes a different form, although each has been the result of consistent ideas and goals throughout the artist's fifteen-year career. *Museotypes,* a work conceived for exhibition at the Renaissance Society, suggests the nature of Knight's working method. The investigation of this particular piece points to its specific implications and a consideration of related earlier pieces further demonstrates the character and development of his work in general.

Sixty bone china dinner plates comprise the Renaissance Society work. Presented like a series of limited edition commemorative plates, the standard china, gold-trim, 10½-inch eggshell-colored plates serve as the background for regal purple-blue images of architectural ground plans drawn to scale. Each ground plan, silk-screened and overglazed in the center of the plate, represents a different museum. As here adopted by Knight, the ground plan, often found on printed museum brochure guides, acts as a visual shorthand, linking institutions of a kind. The plans of each museum convey individual, formal eccentricities, but as a group they present a generalized appearance.

The depiction of the museum through the form of its architectural ground plan influences the level on which the work is perceived. Knight


Museotypes

John Knight, *Museotypes,* 1983, installation views, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1983.

has not represented the particular museums by their most familiar images—a literal rendition of the facade of each one, for example—as might appear on actual commemorative plates. Instead, the abstract configuration of the ground plan serves as a ready-made code or symbol whose concentrated form also identifies it with the contemporary emblematic trademark design, or corporate logotype, which over the last several decades has become an aggressive marketing strategy aimed at instant product visibility and a commonplace of industry. Filling the need for "a graphic device that must positively project an 'all-encompassing' visual image,"[2] the logotype has emerged as an all-pervasive means of identification.

In *Museotypes* Knight fuses various visual but specifically nonart traditions in order to question and revalidate contemporary art practice. Contributing first and foremost to the meaning of this piece is the significant role played by the commemorative plate as a collectable item in

popular culture. Paradoxically, the commemorative plate elevates and reduces all manner of subject to its commercially desirable, mass-produced form. As souvenir and symbol it offers personal identification with idealized or idolized contemporary or historical figures, places, or events in the form of a tangible and decorative object. Such plates incorporate a wide range of visual material from family crests to baseball stars to famous historical sites. They may commemorate a well-known, highly valued Renaissance work of art by Bellini, Botticelli, or Raphael as easily as a painting by Norman Rockwell acclaimed by the populace at large. Others are simply an original design for a specific theme of popular appeal. Limited edition plates are purchased also for investment reasons. Their market is as active and speculative as for any commodity value object and possesses its own exchange mart for buying and selling.

Knight's plates insert themselves into the domain of "high" art, fully acknowledging the "nonart" status of commemorative plates. The subject matter depicted on his plates is, ironically, the museum, that bastion of culture where aesthetic value is not an issue but a given. The unexpected union of museum, commemorative plate, corporate imagery, and investment collecting raises a number of questions and brings certain issues to the fore. In their capacity as commemorative objects, these plates display the ultimate place of display—the museum—enshrining the shrine of culture, memorializing that which memorializes. Objects of commodity value, Knight's plates symbolize the museum, an institution that may indirectly affect the value of objects through the acquisition, exhibition, and preservation of art works. Collectable items by nature, the plates ironically depict that institution in which collecting provides historical credibility. The association of museum and corporate trademark, moreover, allies the museum with the larger commercial and social structure. As the artist maintains, the work thereby becomes "a representation of the museum and its role in the culture."[3] By the way it crosses barriers between so-called high and low art, the piece asks for recognition of the museum's role in determining what is sanctified and for consideration of what, in the end, determines aesthetic value.

Although visually disparate from one another, Knight's works connect thematically in multiple ways. Four major works of the last several years relate directly to *Museotypes* with respect to their concerns and content. These works include the *Journals Series*, begun in 1977 and continuing to the present; a piece proposed in 1981 for exhibition at the Los

Angeles County Museum of Art; an installation exhibited at documenta 7, Kassel, West Germany, in 1982; and a work executed in Paris at the beginning of this year.

Journals Series differs greatly in format from *Museotypes* yet shares much in common with it as well. It is a work that exists outside of any specified exhibition situation, although it was shown in a museum context at the time of The Art Institute of Chicago's *74th American Exhibition* in summer 1982.[4] From the initial conception of this work to the present Knight has mailed to a number of individuals some eighty-five magazine gift subscriptions for periods of six months to a year. The types of high-gloss journals sent by Knight are those found on newsstands everywhere—not the scholarly, technical, or specialized periodical—a fact that is central to this work. Whatever the individual focus—cooking, fashion, interior design, nature, or art—the magazines represent the dominant set of values promulgated by the mass media and supported by the vast majority. Whether by direct advertisement, or indirectly through "up front" suggestion on its cover, the magazine presents a contemporary "view" of the good life.

To a large degree *Journals Series* depends on the recipient selected by Knight, whose own lifestyle throws the character of the received magazine into relief. For example, magazines such as *1001 Home Decorating Ideas* and *Apartment Life* were sent to persons living in small or unpretentious quarters who basically were oblivious to the potentials of home improvement. In a Chicago apartment *Town and Country,* portraying the elite, has been casually set on an early twentieth-century Arts and Crafts table adjacent to grillwork from the demolished Stock Exchange building by Louis Sullivan. The sumptuous look of the magazine in this instance is juxtaposed with objects of an inherently sumptuous nature displayed in an otherwise modest environment.

Many of Knight's recipients are influential or established figures in the field of architecture and art. The architect Frank Gehry, of current international importance, received *Portfolio,* a periodical that superficially surveys the fine arts for an interested general public. If this magazine fills an empty space on the coffee table of one recipient, another may consider it insulting to his or her knowledge and expertise in the given field. One can merely surmise what might have been the reaction of Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen to their subscription to *Art and Antiques.* The contrast is necessarily obvious, however, between the

John Knight, *Journals Series,* 1977–, installation view, *74th American Exhibition,* The Art Institute of Chicago, 1982. Photo: Luis Medina.

contents of this magazine and the pursuits of the recipients, a major contemporary artist and an art historian engaged with the avant-garde.

The interaction of the magazines' contents with the contexts into which they intervene operates on several levels. Potentially providing reading entertainment or practical information, the magazine in home or office may also serve as a decorative object beside a sofa on a coffee table, its colorful, handsome forms enhancing the decor of the room, and, less obviously, referencing the given interior with the "real" world outside as represented by the magazine set in this interior. Nonart by definition, the magazine, like art, nonetheless often plays a purely decorative, nonfunctional role as an object within an interior design.

The most salient characteristic of each journal is its manipulation of the principles of "good" design because every magazine is attentive to codified devices of formal and compositional arrangement. Each magazine displays its own stock of visual formulas be they luxurious interiors on the cover of *Home International;* variations on the seventeenth-century Dutch still-life theme used in depicting soups, salads, and desserts on the cover of *Cuisine*; the ever-changing glamorous woman figured each month on the cover of *Town and Country;* or paintings themselves as cover decoration on *Portfolio*. Details are constantly altered, but ironically the visual conventions of each magazine remain constant so that superficial differences are subsumed into a cumulative impression of uniformity.

Because a magazine is an item of the moment, to be bought when issued and discarded when read, it is irreplaceable on the one hand, but intrinsically valueless on the other. Not obtainable after a certain date and subject to changing attitudes toward design, the magazine with time, however, may evolve into a collector's item, having acquired a certain value with age. The designation of Knight's magazine subscriptions as art underlines these paradoxical aspects and subjects them as works of art to the conditions attending precious objects or limited editions.

The exhibition of a select group of magazine subscriptions, recalled from their recipients for the Art Institute's biennial *American Exhibition,* amplified the questions posed by this work. The museum context with its protective vitrines and meticulous, self-conscious, decorative method of display unavoidably declared the journals be given their due as art, although for what reasons the work deliberately left open: as an

appealing arrangement of color and form, as pictorial information, as design principles of the recent decade, as symbols of our cultural needs and desires, as documents of the tastes of the reader, as literal magazines? With all of the built-in conventions of each magazine's communication strategies, *Journals Series* as a total work disrupts ingrained assumptions about the conventions of viewing art. Expressing the way in which modes of seeing operate in the art and nonart world, the work forces viewers, with their preconceived set of expectations, to reevaluate how one registers what one sees, to reconsider not only how visual material is "read" but also by what means and to what ends different cultural value systems are visually conveyed.

Like the Renaissance Society work, *Journals Series* acknowledges the distinct but undefined dichotomy between art and nonart value systems. These two works are similarly based on the pretensions and commodity value of nonart, as witnessed by the desirability of ornamental plates or the allure of magazine graphics. In both instances, the objects and items considered as "art" thus come as a surprise, even though their decorative design value and use as decor is otherwise taken for granted.

Both *Museotypes* and *Journals Series* underline the importance of contextual considerations in the perception of art. Although they deal with issues of site and location in their separate ways, neither are "site-specific" works because they can function anywhere. For the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's exhibition entitled *Museum as Site: Sixteen Projects* (1981) Knight's work, never implemented, would have been a site-specific piece, as required by the theme of the show. As his proposed contribution to the exhibition, he created a bronze logo for installation in two halves above and below the engraved lettering announcing "The Ahmanson Gallery" on the wall of its exterior entrance. Knight derived the shape of the logo from a ubiquitous motif—a four-sided shape with symmetrical, concave indentations—which is present throughout the museum's architecture. The cross-section of its columns possesses this shape as do the pavement, light fixtures, and carpets.

Through the abstraction and reiteration of this design element existing within the fabric of the museum's structure, Knight produced a self-reflective symbol of the museum. The use of bronze as the material for the logo ironically links the piece with monumental sculpture, a tradition from which the work deliberately detaches itself. The bronze material tauntingly offers nostalgic reference to "free-standing" sculpture

John Knight, unrealized proposal for the *Museum as Site: Sixteen Projects,* Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1981.

because this piece can exist only as an integral part of the institution that solicited it. The work derives its meaning from the specific institution in question and returns meaning to the museum in the form of a sign. Recognizing the power of a single emblematic design in our society, the work sought to present the museum with an image of itself.

The Los Angeles County Museum proposal anticipates the Renaissance Society work because of its creation of an abstract shape from existing architectural form and through its equal identification of this form with museum and corporate imagery. In a succeeding work which he exhibited at documenta 7 (1982)[5] Knight further pursued the implications of the corporate trademark, using its industrial, commercial associations as his point of reference. In similar fashion to *Museotypes,* the documenta 7 work interweaves several separate ideas into an integrated whole. Occurring at four- or five-year intervals, the documenta exhibition, a major international event, was founded with the intent of showing the most up-to-date art. In a letter to the participating artists, the organizers of documenta 7 outlined their concept of the large undertaking. All works were to be recent and were to be juxtaposed with works

by other artists to create a lively interaction between varied artistic approaches. With their premise in mind, Knight selected the walls of the landings of two stairwells connecting the four floors in the main exhibition building for the installation of eight different but identically scaled wall reliefs in the shape of his initials, *JK.* The stairway landings provided uniform rectangular wall areas where each relief could be seen on the visitor's way up or down. In short, Knight centered the work within the spaces leading to and from the main exhibition areas, in between but outside of the officially designated art spaces.

By placing them on the walls of the successive staircase landings of the Museum Fridericianum building, Knight treated the eight sets of initials, intended as a single work, like signs. Measuring 24 × 30 × 1⅞ inches, the initials assume the form of a corporate monogram, the two simplified, attenuated letters sharing the same stem. In addition, around the wooden form of his initials Knight wrapped slick commercial travel posters representing various countries including Austria, Denmark, Germany, Thailand, and so on. The posters glued to the wood surface covered the *JK* monogram almost completely but where the rectangular paper came to an end at the tips of the *J* or the *K* the deliberately handcrafted, "original" quality of the underlying support was revealed.

The documenta work shares common ground with the Renaissance Society piece, representing the artist instead of the museum in relation to the culture at large. Like *Museotypes,* the documenta work appropriates the popular art forms of mechanical mass production in order to question and redefine traditional forms of aesthetic production. Whereas the commemorative plates provide a background for the presentation of the museum, the travel poster—formerly an independent pictorial vehicle—is tailored to the form of the artist's initials, its colorful, scenic imagery reduced to an applied, decorative surface coating. The poster, contoured to the shape of the *JK* and no longer perceptible as a whole, loses its coherent visual image and specific promotional purpose. The "features" of one or another country's snow-capped mountains or quaint cobbled streets are forfeited to the exigencies of covering the initial. Whereas the initials, the final validation of personal authorship and ultimate sign(ature) of the artist, here embody the work, the poster as adapted to the shape of the *JK* no longer functions in its capacity as a sign or as a romanticized image of a place. The initials ground the travel poster, not only literally but figuratively speaking as well. Having lost its

John Knight, *Project for documenta 7,* 1982, detail.

pictorial legibility, although visual details of lettering, format, imagery, and so on remain decipherable, the poster no longer stands as a glorified representation of a geographical region but now exists only as a decorative visual motif. In this work, therefore, Knight confronts the highly technical and proficient power of mechanical reproduction with its ability to govern reality and usurps it for the purpose of art.

The repetition of the form of the initials reduces their personal uniqueness. Moreover, the mechanically reproduced posters, with their seeming pictorial variety, once fragmented to conform to the shape of the initials, reveal their underlying uniformity resulting from their standardized techniques of appeal. At the same time the false, romanticized illusions of the mass media are channeled into the reality of art. The documenta piece, once more comparable with the later Renaissance Society work, grafts a popular and commercial art form with "high" art, appropriating the means of the former in order to investigate the assumptions of the latter. In the process, Knight radically alters previous relationships and divisions between art and reality by inverting that "realistic"

illusionism—which only mechanical reproduction can achieve—and turning it to his own ends.

The placement of the initials in the stairwell landings of the exhibition building, where directional signs or functional objects such as emergency lights and fire extinguishers might otherwise be seen, contributed to the totality of the piece. The *JK* letters, free-floating agents but not independent objects, activate or are activated by their context. The presentation of the initials in the nonart passageways of the documenta building are what gave the work its edge because it both framed and was framed by the exhibition. Taking part in the exhibition by invitation, but situated outside of the conventionally delineated space, the work pointed to the importance of the entire display context. By remaining physically aloof from the exhibition yet directly connected with it, the work drew attention to the theory and mechanisms behind the "exhibition" of art.

Following documenta 7, Knight took part in an exhibition organized in Paris in 1983 by a group of interested artists, critics, collectors, and curators.[6] The concept of the exhibition in conjunction with the particulars of the given space were essential factors in the realization of Knight's work. The organizers of the exhibition invited a number of artists involved with experimental ideas in this country and abroad to use the interior and exterior spaces of an abandoned Paris church next door to the Curie Institute, which was slated for demolition because of projected expansion by the institute. Neither staged in an official space nor organized under official auspices, the exhibition fell into the category of an alternative or "street work" exhibition. As Knight has observed, however, the announcement card for the exhibition fulfilled all of the requirements of a formally designed, traditional museum or gallery mailer. Because the graphics adopted for publicizing the exhibition, by mail and through street advertising, did not convey the free-form experimental potential of the exhibition site, Knight decided to create a work for the show that would give it the image that he felt was lacking in its publicity. To this end he built an eight-foot-tall plywood barrier across the bars of the entry gate that separated the churchyard from the street and that, during the course of the exhibition, was opened and closed each day.

Literally built into the exhibition, Knight's work functioned as an actual and metaphoric facade in the form of a construction site fence. It

John Knight, *Un Travail en Travaux,* installation view*. A Pierre et Marie. Une Exposition en Travaux,* 1983, 36 rue d' Ulm, Paris, France.

answered, furthermore, to the double meaning of the exhibition's title, *Une Exposition en Travaux* (which the English translation, *An Exhibition in Progress/in the Works/under Construction,* does not adequately convey), as did the title of his piece, *Un Travail en Travaux* (*A Work in the Works*). Functioning both as an actual fence and as art, the work represented the transitional nature of the area with the forthcoming demolition of the church. It also represented the character of an exhibition that did not take place within the formal museum or art gallery system but in the freer context of the street and with knowledge of the destruction of the building.

As an embellishment to the work, Knight cut the previously designed monogram of his initials, *JK,* into the plywood fence. At eye-level with the viewer (or voyeur) and on axis with the entry of the church, the initials, while also functioning as his signature, provided a hole typical of actual construction site fences. In addition, Knight pasted paper labels with the title and address of the exhibition, enlarged from the printed invitation, in a straight line across the work at eye level. He thus advertised the informational, advertising nature of the work itself, as

billboard surface, at the same time as he created an image for the exhibition "behind" it. Being inextricably linked with the concept and context of the exhibition, the work, with the exhibition's termination, loses its definition as art but retains its value as a fence.

Un Travail en Travaux clearly relies on the inherent factors of the exhibition as much as it does on the existing physical space. As early as 1976 Knight had begun to conceive works that occurred outside of the confines of the traditionally allotted exhibition area, yet correlated directly with a specific event or institution. Knight's first proposal for his exhibition at the Otis Art Institute Gallery in Los Angeles (1977) affords further insight into his artistic method.

For the exhibition at the Otis Art Institute, Knight exhibited the mailing list of this gallery, presenting it in the manner in which it is actually printed—not simply in an overall alphabetical order, but in a sequence of membership categories. The final work took the form of a book in which Knight listed all of the names preceding his own. Under each name he printed a particular hour and day so that, in effect, he divided the exhibition temporally among a number of individuals. The institute displayed the book in the glass vitrine at its entrance throughout the duration of Knight's show. The preliminary proposal for the work offered another, more provocative dimension although this plan did not materialize. If Knight's original concept had been realized, the mailing list would have been printed to scale on the exterior advertising placards of Wilshire Boulevard buses that regularly pass the institute.

The Otis work as first proposed anticipates *Museotypes* although the specifics of its tactics vary. Although the bus placard, similar to the commemorative plate, furnishes an already existing visual communication system usually at the disposal of the mass media for commercial ends—in this case advertising—the bus provides the actual "vehicle" connecting the museum with society in general. Knight's appropriation of the mailing list as a major component of the work prefigures his later use of the museum ground plan in the Renaissance Society work. Just as the ground plan defines the museum through its architectural form, the mailing list delineates it as a social structure. Like the ground plans on the plates, the printed names on the placards of the bus assume a concrete formal presence of their own. In the members' mailing list for this Los Angeles gallery, the names of Hollywood celebrities are interspersed with unknown names, but the evenly spaced lines of print act

as a leveling agent. The institute's mailing list functions as an abstract, symbolic "form" of reference to the museum rather than as a direct social statement. The printed names thus signify the essential structure of this gallery as represented by its constituents instead of by its architecture.

The Otis bus work, if it had come to pass, would have operated in a number of ways, given the added fact that the institute, located in the midst of Los Angeles's historical shopping district known as the "Miracle Mile," faces onto a side street instead of onto Wilshire Boulevard. A large, enclosed, glass window vitrine on the boulevard side of the building, however, announces the institute's events. During the course of the exhibition it would have displayed the Wilshire bus schedule and thereby reoriented the museum in relation to its physical and social situation in the community. The bus schedule exhibited outside on the wall of the gallery, viewed alike by exhibition visitors and people waiting for the bus, would have created a meeting ground for art and nonart viewers. The proposed Otis work thus re-presents the museum by means of external, nonart systems of display and in light of the social environment. It answers directly to its own "situation" in time and place, and escapes the static limitations of the free-standing object that may be manipulated indiscriminately within the traditionally allotted but unspecified exhibition space.

In 1977 the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art invited Knight as one of a number of participating artists and filmmakers to contribute to a special edition of their *Journal*.[7] Knight submitted a fictional visual narrative about Don and Maureen Campbell, which he later developed in a more complete form as a three-part folding card printed in an edition of four hundred. This work, resembling a greeting card in size and format, has a shiny cool green finish on the outside and a plain white matte finish inside. (A note explains: "The color selection was taken from the Campbell's master bathroom tile.") The front of the card sets the stage for the enterprising Campbells who "thrilled by the realization of their first home . . . decided to have a film made of their new environment . . . and to send prints to close friends and business associates in lieu of Xmas cards." The three interior panels of the card present, from left to right, a visual sequence in diagrams and subtitles. On the first panel one finds a floor plan "supplied by the Campbells for use by the crew" of a typical suburban tract house.[8] On the second panel a

network of crisscross lines connect numerous dots that, superimposed on the floor plan of the house, suggest the frenetic activity that its subtitle explains: "Ten days of production has provided an interesting body of film." The caption of the last panel identifies an otherwise uninterpretable jagged shape: "The Campbells like the film so much that they have decided to use it as a design for the rumpus room they had planned as an addition in the spring."

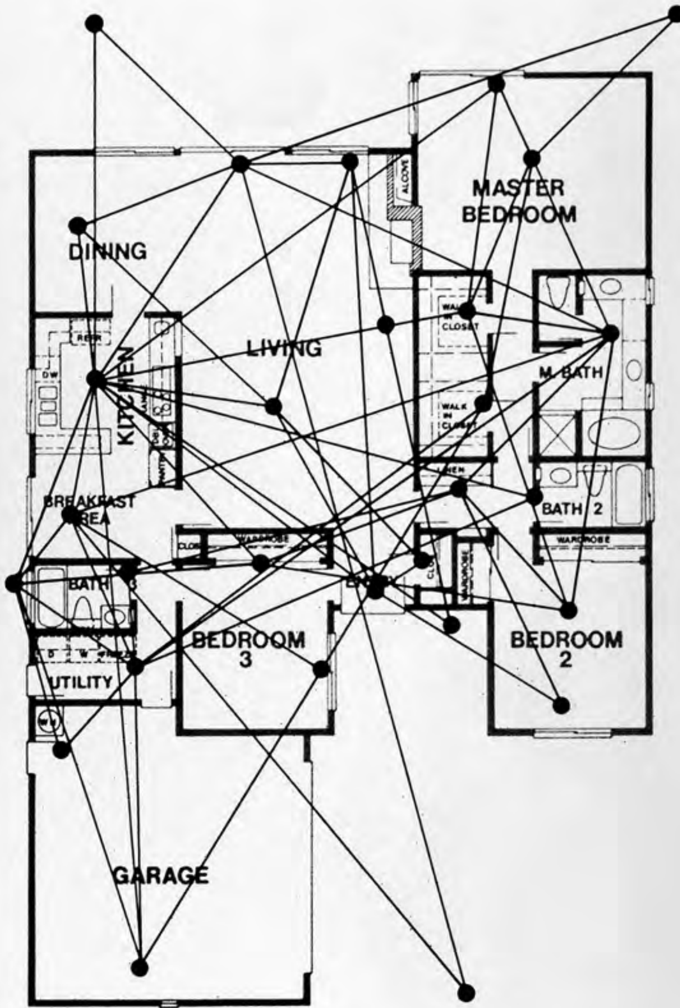
The irrationality expressed by the work gives credence to Knight's personal aesthetic, indirectly serving as a manifesto of his own artistic rationale. From their arty Christmas card idea to their desires for an outmoded rumpus room, the Campbells demonstrate the winds of changing fashion. Thus, on one level Knight parodies the shifting set of values that lead the Campbells from pseudo-creativity to absurdity, as witnessed by their outlandishly shaped rumpus room. On another level, he indicates the potential meaninglessness of visual form—like the rumpus room, whether functional or not—that is arrived at arbitrarily through subjective decision-making processes.

From the outset of his career in the late 1960s to the present, Knight has developed work that is allied with and informed by existing reality. The *Levels* pieces, among the first of his mature works, offer a prelude to his later thinking. Starting in 1968, Knight executed a series of primary structures out of standard carpenter levels, which he placed on edge at regular intervals on the floor of his studio. For one work he arranged the levels in a square, for another in a circle, and for a third he positioned the levels end to end in a line across the room.

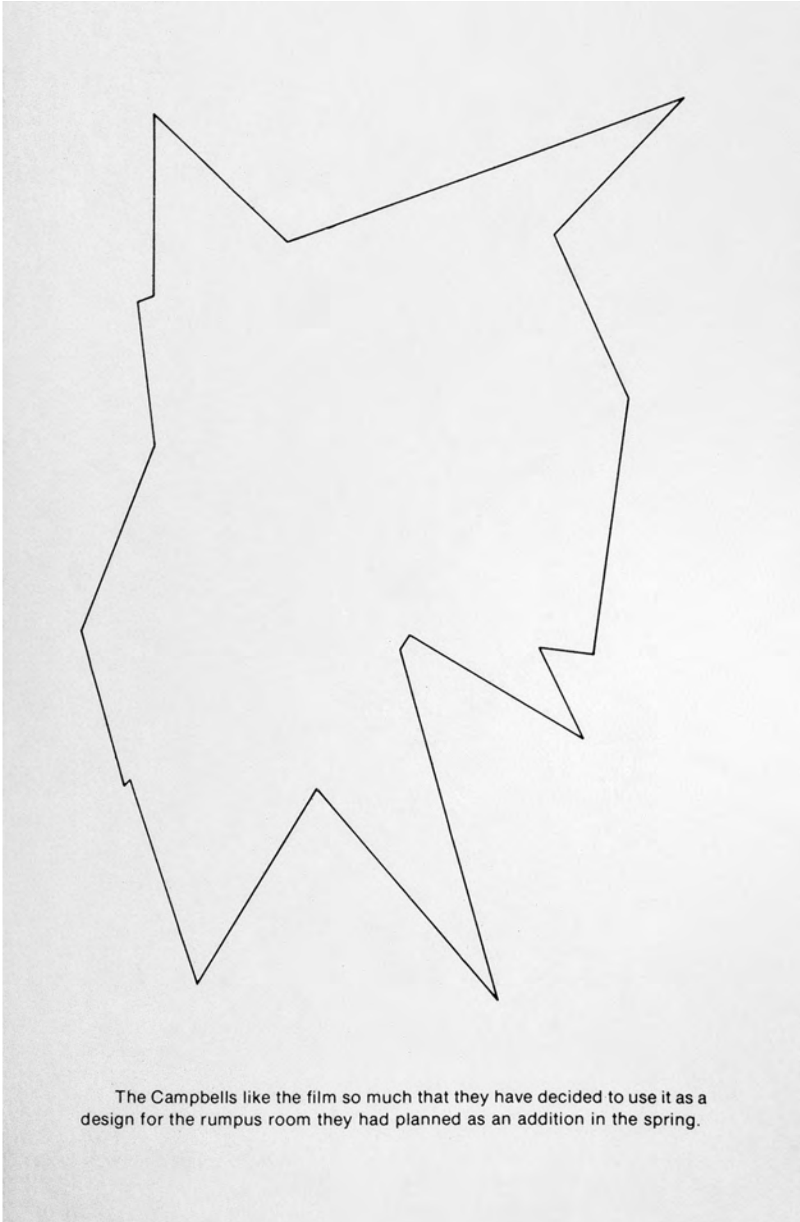
These works mark a major turning point in artistic practice of the period because of the way in which they relate to their environment, formally as shapes and functionally as levels. Following upon the innovations of the immediately preceding generation of artists, including Carl Andre and Donald Judd, whose work in the first half of the 1960s engendered new relationships between sculptural form and its attending physical space, Knight's *Levels* pieces significantly expand these artists' ideas about the interdependence of work and site. His use of commercially available, nonart (but well-designed) objects in the formation of these pieces is comparable to Dan Flavin's previous utilization of fluorescent light fixtures as the medium of his work. Unlike the work of Flavin, however, which both affects and depends on the allotted space, *Levels* comments on the surroundings, without relying on them, by

All the arrangements have been made for production to begin the latter part of the month. The floor plan was supplied by the Campbells for use by the crew.

John Knight, *Untitled (The Don and Maureen Campbell Diagram to Be Applied in Any Metaphoric Manner They Wish),* 1977.



Ten days of production has provided an interesting body of film.



The Campbells like the film so much that they have decided to use it as a design for the rumpus room they had planned as an addition in the spring.

recording the topography of the site. Whereas the work of the earlier Minimal artists is essentially self-referential, *Levels*—actual implements of construction here serving to construct—refers directly to its given location by registering reality in absolute and visual terms. The unequivocal interrelationship of useful object, abstract form, and physical space distinguishes these works from prior artistic achievements while also setting a precedent for Knight's own ensuing concerns.

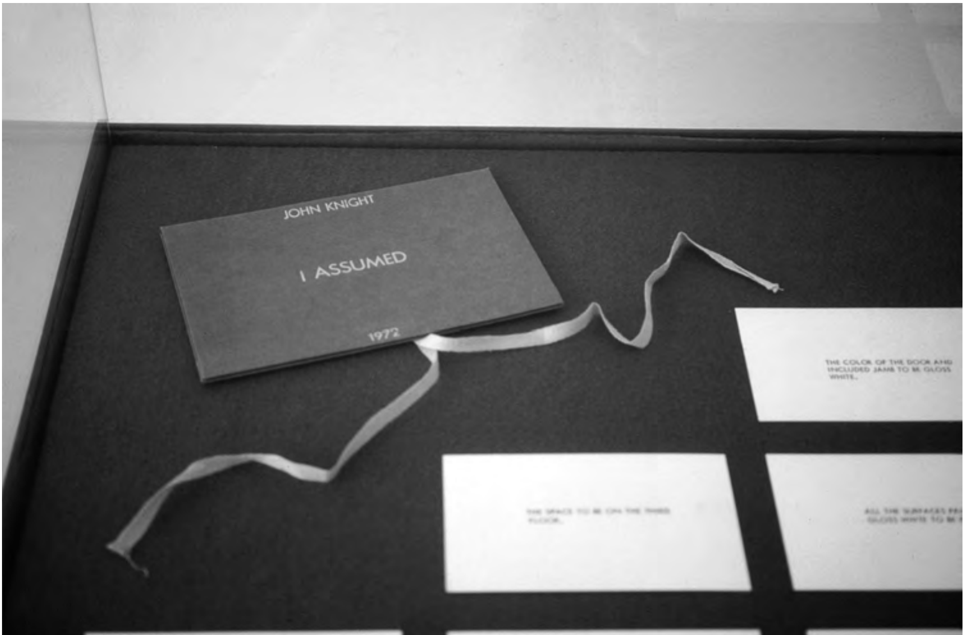
In succeeding early works such as *One Inch to a Foot* (1971) and *I Assumed* (1972), statements of fact similarly imbue the work with its resulting visual form. For the realization of the first of these pieces Knight installed a standard overhead projector on the floor of the Riko Mizuno Gallery in Los Angeles, where he exhibited the work in 1973. Having photographically etched the words "one inch to a foot" in one-inch Helvetica letters on a plate substituted for the regular glass plate of the machine, he projected this phrase in one-foot characters onto the gallery wall.

One Inch to a Foot derives its form from the interaction of its conjoined verbal and graphic content with its architectural context. The one-inch letters on the projector proportion themselves to the one-foot letters on the wall, and they visually engage the surrounding space. Applicable to any spatial situation, the work is self-contained, yet an integral part of its container. Furthermore, Knight's use of lettering—abstract configurations conveying literal content—lays the groundwork for his future involvement with a range of two-dimensional signs. Similar to an advertisement, but with nothing to sell, the elegantly lettered image projected on the wall pointed indirectly to the elegant, meticulously detailed architecture of the Mizuno Gallery.

Statements of fact take on a different form in Knight's slightly later work entitled *I Assumed*. For this piece he printed approximately fifty statements on separate 3 × 5–inch index cards, which he exhibited together in a red expandable file folder. The work arose in response to an invitation from an early alternative space gallery, Project Inc., in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Without having seen the space Knight described a typical gallery by means of phrases such as "the space to appear new but be quite old," "the space to be on the third floor," "three of the walls to be constructed of mortar and brick," and so on. He thereby characterized exhibition spaces in general by means of language, typography, and index cards, engendering alternative modes of

representation and methods of display that are anchored to, but independent of, their referent.

John Knight belongs to the recent generation of artists who in radical manner have questioned previous approaches to making art. His ideas are comparable with those of artists such as Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Dan Graham, and Lawrence Weiner, whose work derives its content from its context. Similar to these artists, he has abandoned traditional modes of painting and sculpture and further expanded their boundaries. Basing his work on contemporary social structures of all kinds and crossing the line between one value system and another, Knight utilizes existing systems of visual communication not generally connected with art. In the process of employing the conventions of given forms of representation and display not directly defined as fine art, Knight challenges and redefines artistic convention in order to offer new visual experience.



John Knight, *I Assumed,*1972, installation view, Witte de With, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 1990. Photo: Bob Goedewaagen.

Notes

1. Harry L. Gage, "Preface," in *Trade-Marks: Designed by Clarence P. Hornung* (New York: Caxton Press, 1930), vi.

2. Lester Beall, "The Trademark: A Graphic Summation of Individuality," in *TM: TRADEMARKS/USA 1945–1963*, exhibition catalog (Chicago: Society of Typographic Arts, 1968), quoted in *Objects and Logotypes: Relationships between Minimalist Art and Corporate Design*, exhibition catalog, ed. Buzz Spector (Chicago: The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1980), 5.

3. John Knight in conversation with the author, July 1983.

4. See Anne Rorimer, "Introduction," in *74th American Exhibition*, exhibition catalog (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1982), 10.

5. Also discussed by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Documenta 7: A Dictionary of Received Ideas," *October* 22 (Fall 1982): 124–125.

6. As stated on the invitation to the exhibition, the organizers were Daniel Buren, Michel Claura, Jean-Hubert Martin, Sarkis, and Selman Selvi.

7. "The Don and Maureen Campbell Diagram to be Applied in Any Metaphoric Manner They Wish," *LAICA Journal,* no. 14 (April–May, 1977): 28–31.

8. Procured by Knight from the real estate section of the *Los Angeles Times*.

Turning the Conversation

Kim Gordon

> Rationalism is necessary like order, but whatever the order, it can be upset by the external factors of another order—whether historical, geological, psychological.
>
> —Aldo Rossi

In Los Angeles an illusion of rationality or order has evolved through the use of designed displays in an otherwise boundaryless desertscape. To live in this kind of environment, which borders on the sci-fi, where design has impregnated your private memories and images, where the visual exterior doesn't stop at your front door, is to become slightly irrational or schizophrenic. Because of the vastness of Los Angeles things are seen only in fragments, without a sense of the whole except through the repetition of advertising logos and billboard images. The designed display sensibility embodies the utopia that is not possible, finalizing the irrationality of the individual. It is easy to see how someone here becomes obsessed with the redirection of design. John Knight is one of these artists. Similar to the work of Ed Ruscha, the art takes its content from its environment, Los Angeles, rather than any one art formalism. To be influenced by the surroundings and then to let these obsessions, perversions, and passions in turn affect the work leads to art that is less pure but is perhaps more interesting, because it opens up the possibility for other thoughts. Although LA is similar in many ways to any large suburban city, it is unique in both its perversion of the *new* and its inability to really escape from the past. Even though the media allude to

a sense of freedom, the psychological makeup is one of Midwest repression. The copy (advertising) exists with the original conception (the American dream) as a sign exclaiming both individual freedom and an announcement of its death. Even as the object or image arouses memories that lead to other events and other lives, this speaks of the past and not the city of the future. There is no dialectic between the old and the new, no difference between the representation and the rerepresentation. Instead, the two combine and evolve into a "do-it-yourself" sensibility, which is the lifestyle of a pioneer, symbolic of a retreat or link with the past. The result is an abundance of customization, and the stylized aesthetic of the tract communities that take on various generic design traits relating them geographically to the small towns across the country from which most everyone has come.

John Knight's work for his exhibition at LAICA is an embellishment of the alternative space. By displaying LAICA's many contradictions and the complexity of its situation in purpose and direction, an analogy is made to the city itself. Similar to many alternative spaces, LAICA is a sort of "do-it-yourself" business that has to appeal to both the community and the corporate business world as a viable and fundable organization. Conventionally it is the gallery that designs the scenario within which the artist places his or her work. If the exhibition is a good one, then the space is a good one. In Knight's redesign of the space he is exaggerating what is inherent within the ideological and psychological makeup of LAICA, making it into a set for whatever may unfold.

As you enter the reception area, covering the wall opposite the door is a mural: a Western frontier landscape. Superimposed on the mural is "LAICA" and underneath the tagline, "When the Conversation Turns to Art." The Western pioneer imagery was chosen as a symbolic shared spirit between LAICA and corporate advertising aesthetics, such as those of Marlboro, Western Federal Savings, and Wells Fargo. For the corporation, it functions by presenting a cohesiveness, as in the Wells Fargo ad wherein the image shows the original Wells Fargo stagecoach bringing information and paychecks from the East to the West and stopping at isolated outposts of civilization along the way. It presents the corporation as a primary force in making possible what now exists. Superimposed on this scenario of the past is the photo advertising technology of the present. This strategy of the image appears on corporate billboards

John Knight, *Project for Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art,* 1984, installation view, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art.

throughout the city and extends the locus of the corporation, becoming a part of the exterior architecture of the city. Through their repetition they create the sense of momentum and the illusion of a series of events: heroic service. For LAICA the isolated display of the mural represents a fragment of its concerns: corporate visibility and the evolution or progress of the alternative space toward a state of higher visibility within the community and on an international level. Because LAICA is not a corporation or a commercial venture on any level, not even big enough to qualify as a museum, it remains as a makeshift *business-oriented* concern. Within the existing elements of the reception area, such as the carpeted walls, monumentalized reception desk, and the sliding glass doors that open onto a homey patio, where flowers and plants are somewhat overgrown, can be seen the contradictions between an attempt at corporate office style and California home living. It is these conflicting values that Knight has embellished as an artist taking on the role of the designer. After all, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

As in all of John Knight's work, detail is very important. Detail gives realism to otherwise fictional, theoretical, and, therefore, abstract ideas. The framed presentation of LAICA's letterhead and stationery is part of the mood, as is the use of the small adjoining gallery. A small business might display its letterhead; a corporation wouldn't. However, a corporation would have a room to display its current projects and past accomplishments. LAICA's display-entrance gallery remains empty, the memory of a corporate display experience. As the redesign centers on the reception area, it returns the space back metaphorically to its original residential structure.

In its present evolution LAICA can be seen as analogous to a villa structure . . . complete with corridors and a rambling ambiance that suggests a multitude of mysterious events and an eliteness of class that doesn't correspond to LAICA's plea for public interaction and monetary dependence. As an archetypal house structure, LAICA is reduced to the one-event idea that a house traditionally holds. As Knight proposes, that one event is the exteriorization of LAICA, changed to serve as a placement-service concern. This reflects LAICA's desired interaction with the community, analogous to the way media images are internalized within one's private thoughts and refracted in one's home design. The mural image begins to take on its own meaning for LAICA (the shed structure in the picture now symbolizes the original house . . . LAICA's ancestry) because the space is redesigned to correspond to the images within interior decorating and architecture magazines, which represent some ideal utopia. The interiors in the magazines are often designed for the finality of the magazine displays. John Knight's use of the rectangular perspective of the reception area, with the desk framing the mural, is a three-dimensional experience of a magazine. It is this area where the subjective element within advertising media is confused with the individual's experience of the subjective, where the work becomes most like science fiction in which all the preoccupation with detail marks the realism of today.

Three conventional wall reliefs of Knight's, used in other shows, repeat themselves here, but the surface motif has been changed to reflect the present content: LAICA. Previously done for documenta 7, the wood reliefs cut in the shape of his initials *JK* were then wrapped with glossy travel posters advertising different countries.

> The posters glued to the wood surface covered the *JK* monogram almost completely but where the rectangular paper came to an end at the tips of the *J* or the *K* the deliberately handcrafted "original" quality of the underlying work was revealed. . . . By placing them on the walls of the successive staircase landings of the Museum Fridericianum building, Knight treated the eight sets of initials, intended as a single work, like signs.[1]

Now the *JK*s are wrapped with the Western landscape images. The first relief the viewer sees hangs in LAICA's reception area. In the context of LAICA and this exhibition, it is "high" art but is also reminiscent of reception area decor being set against the carpeted wall covering. Another relief is placed just outside the public area but within view at the end of the hall that leads to the inner offices. Along these walls, not visible to the public, with the exception of one corner wall, is a collection of various artists' works donated to LAICA. Collectively they are referred to as "The Building Fund" (the sale of the work produces funds for the maintenance of the alternative space). This relief marks LAICA's

John Knight, *Project for Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art,* 1984, installation view, Wells Fargo Bank, Santa Monica.

past. The third relief has been placed in a Wells Fargo bank branch in Santa Monica in a small seating alcove where art is usually hung on the wall. The use of the latter space is one of the primary interests that have been voiced by the director of the institute to be pursued as future concerns.

Similar to the work of architect Aldo Rossi, Knight is concerned with the topography of the object. One cannot describe an artwork without describing all events surrounding it. To describe the topography of Los Angeles is to describe its media. The dynamics of the topography are expressed here through the changes in scale. From the wall mural to the desk to the stationery to the wall reliefs and finally to the cover of the catalog . . . the image changes from the monumental to the personal . . . from the interior (strategy) to the exterior (relief) . . . from the public (LAICA catalog) to the privacy of the home . . . from the real past to the filmic (mural) to the facade of the interior of LAICA. As its front and back cover, the frontier pioneer imagery wrapping the catalog/*Journal* issue blends in on the newsstands with other nonprofessional-type publications such as *Arizona Highways* or *Southern California Living,* and LAICA achieves, finally, a credible corporate image outside itself. Placed within the designated section for art magazines whose covers display art as design, the *Journal* cover stands apart, looking misplaced. In this generic setting it is the content, finally, that determines its usefulness or merit . . . from individual to individual, it becomes aligned with other orders.

Note

1. Anne Rorimer, "On John Knight," in *John Knight*, exhibition catalog (Chicago: The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1983), n.p. Reprinted in this volume.

Jay Sanders *reads* John Knight

Jay Sanders and John Knight

JAY SANDERS I wanted to start with a general observation on your work, something that I find strongly differentiates it from most contemporary art practices. The objects which emerge as a result of your endeavors inevitably do so with a very keen sense of self-awareness. Meaning that they actively beg the question of their own existence and their status as objects—linked to whatever system brought them into being, or directed them to their present locale. More often, when an art practice conveys "critique" or self-consciousness of any sort, these attributes inadvertently double as traits which then bolster the object's desirability, especially when conveyed as a move forward within the narrative ups and downs of a medium (i.e., "the problems of painting," photography, and so on), or to use your own words, when they assume "the role of a cultural custodian." But any radicality typically stops well short of questioning the object's integrity or too severely complicating its arrival into the exhibition site. In your work, the question of value, on the other hand, keeps moving all the way through and fully permeates your projects. (In fact, your best-known New York gallery show involved nothing for sale.) To quote a statement you made in a recent interview, your work enacts "a moment of resistance in the commodity exchange, when the receiver is given the task to figure out how, if at all, to commodify a product, which might define the terms of its own unique commodity status."[1] So as we're focusing here on a discussion centered on your engagement with books, which is a sizable aspect of your art practice, I would say that, for example, in the case of *Cold Cuts* (2008), your most

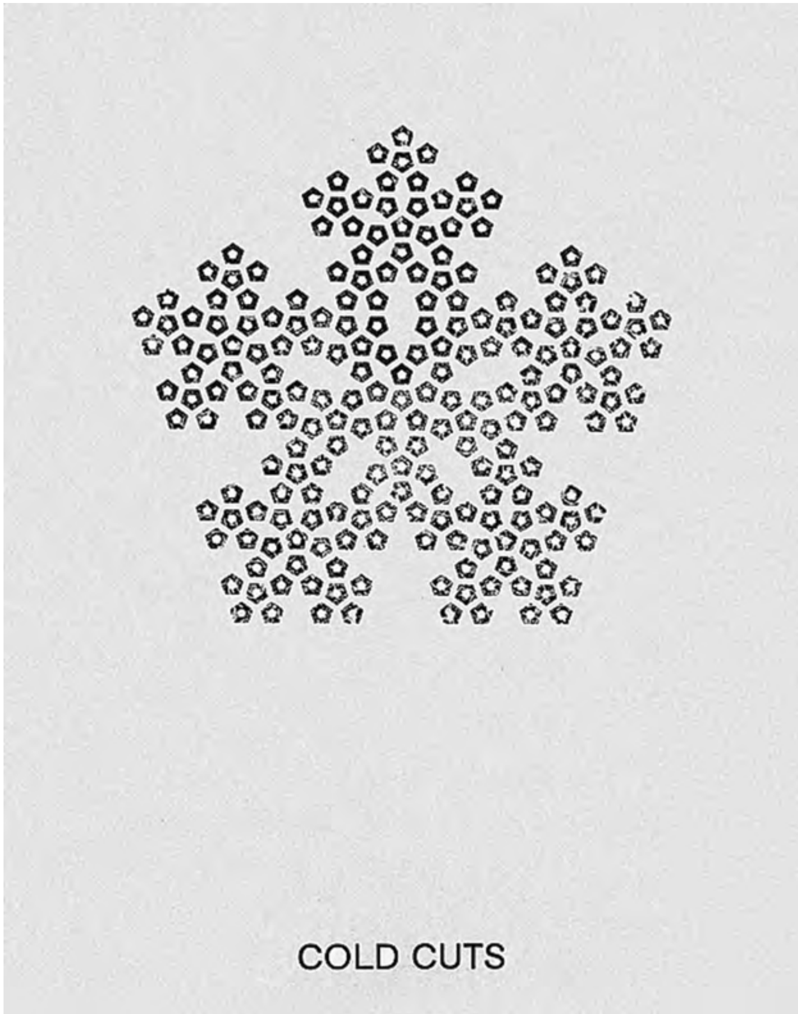
John Knight, *Cold Cuts,* 2008, installation view, Espai d'Art Contemporani de Castellón, Spain. Photo: Angel Sánchez.

recent institutional exhibition, the book stands as one in a series of key devices that you have carefully developed to activate alternative relationships and economies that can still importantly exhibit themselves in an art milieu. Your repertoire includes such devices as mirrors, exchanges/trades or gifts, logotypes and graphic iconography, miniaturized silhouettes and outlines, travel and tourism photography—forms which often immediately refocus their perceivers to additional sites, elsewheres, which are intrinsic to the art activity too. *Cold Cuts*, in fact, employs a multitude of these strategies. You also make more conventional exhibition catalogs for the majority of your shows, and I'd like to ask you about these as well—but to start, maybe you could say a bit about *Cold Cuts* (2008) and how it found its form as a cookbook?

JOHN KNIGHT Well, if one were to agree with your initial observations—which I would hope my object[s] encourage one to do—then its "status" as a cookbook is contingent upon its ability to provide a hybrid moment between the politics of sustenance (resistance) and the apparatus of repression. Or, more simply stated, what cookbook?

JS Right. I could have just as easily asked how *Cold Cuts* found its form as a US military history book, or—though one could almost forget—how it serves as an exhibition catalog. This last classification points to the intensely considered choreography of hybrid moments that typifies your work. Here the forced collision of exotic food photography and recipes from countries around the world with quotes pertaining to US foreign policy toward these countries and the code names for aggressive covert operations against them (with a glossary that conflates all the potentially unknown terms by basic alphabetization) creates a book whose own internal logic speaks to issues of geo- and biopolitics to an extreme degree without you as an author saying a word. Through juxtapositions and, basically, book design, *Cold Cuts* holds itself together while undercutting the integrity of the genre conventions of less polyvalent publishing endeavors. I'm curious, as this book finds its way into the homes of those interested in your work, do you see it specifically functioning in a domestic setting? To any other artist, this would seem an odd question, but thinking of your infamous *Journals Series* project (1977–) in which you ordered specific magazine subscriptions to people's residences, I wonder how you imagine the possibilities for the work's continued reception, in terms of the overall design, content, and the book itself as a model for an art/design undertaking.

JK Interestingly enough, your inclination to open up the conversation with a bias toward one subject among others is curiously consistent with a number of other early respondents to this project—which makes me think that it might not, in fact, be just as easy to enter *Cold Cuts* via the subject form of the military industrial complex, opting instead to repress the work's more violent tendencies. I also remain encouraged by the near dismissive role you assign to the book's function in terms of an exhibition catalog, as it was crucial for me that its function as a conventional document be tentative enough to allow the possibility for an inversion of the established registers of primary and secondary text, hence treating the "exhibition problem" as propaganda and the document as the primary site of reception. Through hybridism and inversion there may also be the possibility to create a space that links the private and intimate act of reading to acts of public perception without concern for a particular social typology—as the *Journals Series* was not concerned with the specificity of place, but rather with the order of reception. By the way, what is art/design?



John Knight, *Cold Cuts,* 2008, detail.

JS What I mean to say is that your work has consistently enacted a deep interrogation of the effects and perceived autonomy of "design" while doing so within the framework and auspices of the art world. This territory of "art and design" has been much discussed in the last decade as artists purportedly "blur" the boundaries between art and architectural, graphic, and product designs. But your work has a particularly prophetic capability. For decades it has radically reconfigured site specificity, the ready-made, and institutional critique, turning these operations on their weary heads. And as your projects borrow from advertising and product design strategies, they in turn articulate the destructive capacity of these industries. As we've talked about *Cold Cuts,* other major projects, beginning in the late eighties, such as *Federal Style* (1989), in which small copper relief maps of Native American reservations were affixed to a large wall sign reading *FEDERAL STYLE,* as well as *Bienvenido* (1990), *De Campagne* (1992–1993), and *Worldebt* (1994) come to mind, as they too extend far beyond a critique specific to art-world conditions, moving on toward multinational politics and issues around indigenous populations. Not to ask you to sum up your work in any way, which I wouldn't dare, but can you say a bit about your tactics of exposing the dominating effects of design and its instrumentation of power?

JK Well, at this point in time any notion of a separate space of culture production operating as the dialectical other to the all-encompassing site of propaganda appears to be nothing more than a self-perpetuating myth—a myth driven by the ideological language of design. Furthermore, I would suggest that there are no longer any boundaries to "blur," as those activities within and beyond the world of art are merely the actions of alienated individuals scurrying about in a desperate search for the remains of untapped market opportunities. If these assessments are at all accurate, and individual and collective practice has been hijacked, then any interrogation of the dominating effects of design would have to come directly from within the instrumentation of power itself. Thus, the conscious hybridization of subjects or constellations of dominant subjects just might be one way to open up the possibility for the likeness of a counterspectacle as a tactic of recuperation—exaggerated and hyper-designed sites of agitation that attempt to insist on the utility rather than the autonomy of work. All of which, as you point out, is understood within the framework and auspices of the art world—or, as suggested by Benjamin [Buchloh], exhibition design turned into a form of "pandemic spectacle."

JS As your projects are so situationally derived, their afterlife ensues primarily through the publications that accompany your exhibitions. Here I see a very substantial aspect of your art practice: the production of an ongoing series—I count at least nine—of exhibition catalogs for your museum and gallery shows beginning in the mid-eighties. They are in many ways conspicuously all the same. Nine-by-eight-inch, staple bound, with white covers bearing the title of whatever project they encapsulate and typically featuring a die-cut hole as their cover design, which reveals an image beneath. The inside covers are printed with a repeating logo pattern, which also refers specifically to the hosting institution or to another aspect of the project. The internal structure, too, is consistent. The font used is Times Roman or more recently Bembo, and the content is organized into a title page, a list of acknowledgments often in reverse alphabetical order (Z–A), an introductory text, and one or more critical essays on your work accompanying reproductions of both past and current projects. At the end is a very short biography listing only the year or city of your birth (1945, Los Angeles or Hollywood) and where you are currently residing. Then, conspicuously, you never list your exhibition history, but instead offer a "Selected Bibliography" of articles and essays about your work. Seeing any one of these catalogs on its own, the design is innocuous enough that all these particularities recede beneath the informative capability of the catalog, but after twenty-plus years, this consistency is quite striking. Anyone even remotely familiar with your working methods can assume that this repetition of uniformity is anything but arbitrary. So here I would ask about the nature of your design decisions as they spin out into this series of books. Unlike *Cold Cuts*, these catalogs do look and act like art exhibition catalogs, but I feel like there is also more at work here.

JK Ah, you have nine; unfortunately a couple of others are virtually impossible to find. In any event, this is an open-ended "series" initiated around a multitude of concerns having to do with the terms of praxis, or more precisely, the linkage between theory and production—which means leaving no stone left unturned, so to speak. In this instance, the geography of a document within and for a project works in situ—wherein, more often than not, little residual evidence remains at the end of the day. Under these conditions, instead of producing documents relegated to the conventional terms of reification, each subsequent edition assumes the role of an archival fragment—work after work—designed in essence, in a

John Knight, selection of artist's catalogs, 2009.

John Knight, *Shimado,* 1987, Gallery Shimada, Yamaguchi, Japan, detail.

manner that resists the whims of imposed taste, while at the same time acting as a critical extension to a larger interrogation of design's custodial role in the hegemon. In order to do so, however, the document's own interior standards need to maintain a similar degree of discursive agency as the project that it is a document of. For example, the presumptuous gaze through an oculus to something prosaic. Or, the printed form of traditional "end paper" patterns that translate bucolic narratives into corporate branding—with all of its associative implications. The purposeful negation of the ISBN registration, originally developed to facilitate identification and sales, yes the conspicuous absence of the primary signifier of exchange in lieu of the bibliographic. All of which is contained within the most generic of formats, one sequel after another.

JS I appreciate your thorough response here. In many ways, the primary delivery device for many of us following your work is these catalogs—so their importance, I would say, can't be overstated. It's a very subtle but potent balance, to occupy the site of recapitulation and theorization of your own work—episodically cataloging your context-specific projects, while simultaneously taking on the catalog site as an ongoing moment for reconfiguration. With its own format already in place, it transforms into a serial work of its own, though it's careful not to announce itself as such, nor are the books at all widely distributed. And instead of bolstering the status of the art objects as they live on, disconnected from their initial currents, your catalogs contain highly informed critical essays by theorists such as Benjamin Buchloh, Alexander Alberro, and many others who already "read" and situate your new projects within the context of your ongoing practice. I am curious about how you view these writers as collaborators in that respect. And also another question, do you see precedents for your catalog work in any other Conceptual art practices? I wondered if, for example, the museum catalogs of Marcel Broodthaers would be apropos? Or Daniel Buren's 1986 catalog from the forty-second Venice Biennial, which also shares some formal characteristics with your book design?

JK In fact, the books' less-than-ubiquitous availability is most certainly a direct result of not being represented by the ISBN network. Beyond that, I would not consider work on my work to be collaborative, but rather parts of a discursive constellation of shared interests conjoining—or, to put it into political perspective, the meeting of fellow travelers, including

John Knight, *Curb Appeal,* 1966/2012, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, detail.

Anne Rorimer, Birgit Pelzer, and Fred Leen. Now, if we can agree to recuse ourselves from such institutional drivel as Conceptual art, I would begin by saying that I've never had any real affinity with either the exhibition catalog or the craft-centric "artist's book." On the other hand, I can think of a number of historical instances that had an impact on my thinking, such as the extraordinary book projects of Stanley Brouwn, nearly all produced by Walther König—in particular, *This Way Brouwn* (1960–1964). And by extension, The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design publications of Kasper König, and thereafter Benjamin Buchloh. Altogether, there were a number of memorable projects such as *Raw Notes* (Claes Oldenburg, 1973), *Handbook in Motion* (Simone Forti, 1974), and Benjamin's terrific collaboration with Michael [Asher]. Claes's *Store Days* (1967) also had a great impact. Most important were Ed's [Ruscha] seminal book works. On a completely different tack were the modest publications being produced by small project-run venues throughout Europe and, to a lesser extent, North and South America in the late sixties and early seventies. And, in peripheral ways, projects like Daniel's "Function of the Museum" and Marcel's "Industrial Poems."

JS Looking to your most recent show, last year's *Works in Situ, A Work in Situ* at Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle, Munich, in a strange way we finally get a résumé of sorts. But instead of finding your exhibition history in a printed form, it here becomes the exhibition itself, inasmuch as the show is of signage—the designed title motifs from your past exhibitions, from the seventies to the present, affixed to the walls. The accompanying

catalog presents installation photos of these vinyl letterings as installed in the gallery, and written contributions by a good many of the past presenters of your work from galleries and museums worldwide, recounting their experiences and impressions. This compendium of nearly forty years' work, as it's been torqued into a new "work in situ," appears both voluminous—as each moniker is an emblem of a densely conceived site-specific interrogation—and quite vacant, as it's clear how little is actually there. This range is even apparent in the texts. In one peculiar remembrance, *Quiet Quality,* the gallerist Richard Kuhlenschmidt admits not being able to recall what the show was. The whole project seems to deeply problematize any categorical clarities among promotion, artwork, and artistic career. Were you considering these fault lines in "retrospect" as you staged this particularly evacuated one as a gallery exhibition?

JK Yes, this project has all to do with the "retrospective" problem in general and with being subjected to the conditions of site specificity in particular, a subject that has long been of interest to me. What prompted me to take it up at this time, however, was an invitation to consider a project for the gallery's fortieth anniversary. It goes without saying that the function of the retrospective exhibition has been to lend historical legitimation to the remains of autonomous studio production, namely, the plethora of dislocated rusty artifacts that can be found scattered about the institutional frame in preparation for the specter of the marketplace. What is not evident is the value that such an anachronistic exhibition model can contribute to works in situ—and, if anything, what form it might assume. This does not exactly take us to your question of what is being problematized, but rather what form of an "exhibition problem" is being proposed. To this response, then, I would answer one that is attempting to conflate the many discursive subjects—including the document—that informed the specific character of a collected body of earlier projects, in a similar manner that would inform the specific character of what otherwise would be referred to as the "retrospective" moment—that is itself a new work in situ. Or, put in discursive terms: *ex situ.*

Note

1. "Who's Afraid of JK? An Interview with John Knight by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Isabelle Graw," *Texte zur Kunst,* no. 59 (September 2005): 118–132. [Reprinted in this volume; *Institutional Critique. An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 396–405.—Ed.].

Interview with John Knight

Marie-Ange Brayer

MARIE-ANGE BRAYER In 1969, you put six levels on the floor: *Levels* was one of your first pieces and dealt with the idea of formal reduction as it can be found in Carl Andre's work, for instance. At the same time, however, the levels referred to the site that they were literally measuring. How would you describe the relation of this piece to Minimal and Conceptual art?

JOHN KNIGHT Between 1968 and 1970, I produced, among other things, a series of works using carpenter's levels. However, none of these projects drew any particular referent from Andre or any other reductive sensibility. I think it would be accurate to say that these projects responded to certain critical problems shared by many artists. Specifically, a confluence of issues from the object in sculpture to the architecture of presentation. Any appearance to either Minimal or Conceptual ideologies would be as a shared cultural reflection presented in the form of subtextual irony.

MB In 1977 you bought magazine subscriptions and had them sent to people. Was part of your intention behind *Journals Series* to subvert the role of artist and receiver?

JK The year 1977 marks the beginning of an open-ended project to date that amounts to the unsolicited mailings of popular journals. My intention was not to subvert either the role of the artist or receiver, rather to invert the position of the institution, in an effort to check the process of reification. As a result, it might have presumed onto the

receiver the unsolicited terms of a collector, or, at least, the conservator of a value potential object.

MB Did you regard the journals as objects suspended between the notion of consumption and the aesthetic dimension generally ascribed to works of art?

JK For some time I have had a particular fascination with certain semiological inversions inherently suggested in journals. My choice to use a popular journal was not based on its sovereignty as an object, but on the basis of its complex and contradictory nature as both a prescriber for and exemplary object of consumer industry.

MB Which kind of response did the journals produce?

JK It is within the character of unsolicited behavior to circumvent the path of political correctness, rationality has the tendency to wobble, opening the door for a myriad of responses. For example: "I should have known I was losing a son and gaining a daughter without going to a wedding when he started making soufflés and reading *Apartment Life*."

MB Did you follow a similar strategy with the project for the Canadian art magazine *Parachute*?

JK Actually, a somewhat contrary "strategy," as the parameters for this project were prescribed by the editor. In 1988, I was invited, together with twenty-four other artists, to contribute to the fiftieth edition issue of *Parachute* magazine. Designed to commemorate the journal's tenth-year anniversary, each artist was allotted two pages to do with what he or she pleased. Instead, I chose to alter the textual nature of their standard subscription format from *Parachute* to *Parachute/Knight*. In addition to this, I included an editor's postscript that read: "When the conversation turns to Art, open *Parachute*. See attached envelope for instructions on how to receive your Designer Subscription." To complete the conventional tripartite experience, a cooperative subscriber was needed in order to bestow onto the editor a rarefied object worthy of celebratory desires and, thereby, subverting the reification process inherent in the production-consumption cycle.

MB All of these works, like *Journals Series* or *Parachute,* interweave the activities of the artist, receiver, and collector. But the *JK* relief, which first appeared at documenta 7 in 1982, carries a private and public

meaning at the same time. It is a signature, a personal identification, but integrated in a public dimension, designed like a logotype used in advertising, for tourist destinations in this case.

JK Yes.

MB How exactly did you show the travel posters?

JK I selected the stairways; there were eight landings that determined eight pieces. One *JK* wrapped by a travel poster at each location. Choosing a site in the museum, outside of the formal presentation area, which is normally relegated to service and circulation, allowed the work a greater autonomy than it might otherwise have had. As the viewer scurried from floor to floor in the process of touring the grand salons, they offered an oblique reading, not unlike that of other forms of serial information. However, in this instance, a radical shift was posed by subverting the serial presumption with eight different posters. I wanted to illustrate how graphic mechanisms in advertising determine the nature of how the image operates, whether it is a flower or a flounder.

MB In your practice, you use flags, journals, carpets, and travel posters. There is an instability of the medium. We can't identify your work from this point of view, as is the case with other artists who repeat the same identifiable form.

JK I don't think it is a question of an instability of the medium inasmuch as it is an indication of a practice not engaged in the tautological convulsions of identity. It has never been my concern whether one can identify something as my work but that it engages your ideological interests. By definition, the medium is a conduit, not a calling card.

MB Do you agree with critics who think that your work is political, that as an artist you are, for instance, committed to the defense of Native American communities? I am thinking of *Federal Style, Łeetsoii,* and your piece at Galerie Micheline Szwajcer in April 1990, all of which had an overt political meaning and are connected to the history of the United States, especially to the extermination of indigenous populations.

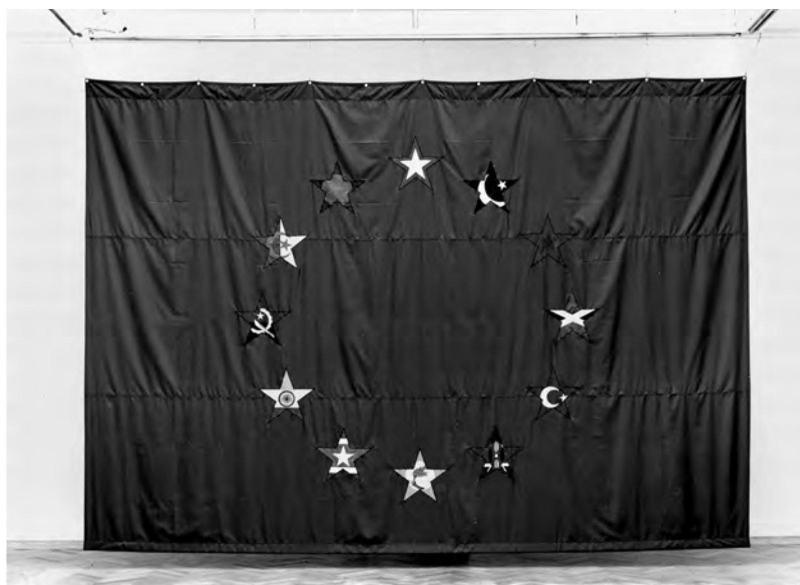
JK I think my activity represents a critical reflection of politics. As an individual, I can only be committed to my reflections. As an artist, I am committed to the socialization of those reflections. And as a twentieth-century

John Knight, *The Anthropologist Guestlist,* 1990, installation view, Galerie Micheline Szwajcer, Antwerp, Belgium. Courtesy: The artist and Galerie Micheline Szwajcer. Photo: Philippe. Degobert.

citizen, I'm painfully aware of the horrific conditions that have been created by the industrialized nations.

MB At the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, you filled the twelve stars representing the European Community with the flags of those countries from which high rates of immigrants came to Europe, for example Morocco or Turkey. This way you injected a social content and a basic diversity into the standardized appearance of the European Community. Yet a telephone number on the wall seemed to subvert this first reading.

JK In April 1991, I created a work for an exhibition at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, which involved the fabrication of a large flag. The design for this flag was based on the European Community flag. However, in place of the twelve gold stars were represented star-shaped portions of the twelve largest "guest" worker nation flags. By annexing the graphic information with the existing hegemonic sign, it was my intention to redirect, not inject, social content. One should not be misled by the seemingly benign presence of a gold star. And as the work's title suggested, *Treize à la Douzaine*, a thirteenth, as yet nonrepresented party, is



John Knight, *Treize à la Douzaine,* 1991, installation view, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Belgium. Courtesy: Archives Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels. Photo: Philippe Degobert.

presented. The telephone number was included in order to disallow an exclusive reading only.

MB Interestingly enough, you called your exhibition at the Villa Gillet in Lyon (1989) *Ex Situ*. How would you describe the relation of your work to architecture and the problem of working in situ?

JK I presume that you are referring to my project commissioned by the F.R.A.C. Rhône-Alpes, which is housed in the Villa Gillet. As you may know, the F.R.A.C. is a government-sponsored program for the acquisition and dispersal of culture. In this respect, the F.R.A.C. functions as a segueing to permanence within the museum system. With this in mind, together with the director's proposal that I create a new work specifically upon the occasion of the F.R.A.C.'s invitation, the commission for me raised interesting polemics around the issues of both art and architecture, and work in situ. The project itself amounted to the replication of the ten different and original late nineteenth-century mirrors, which remain as a part of the Villa Gillet's new interior design. These

John Knight, *Ex Situ,* 1989, installation view, Institut d'Art Contemporain, Villeurbanne, Rhône-Alpes, France. Courtesy: The artist and Institut d'Art Contemporain, Rhône-Alpes.

together with the original architectural shell, coexist within a radically altered institutional function. Therefore, the relationship in this work was not between art and architecture, rather between the phenomenon of restoration and renovation. As a result, the work is absolutely of one thing and destined for another. *Ex situ*.

MB For a project in 1990 you wrote the word *bienvenido* meaning *welcome* onto the large windows of the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art. The choice of the Spanish language intends to signify the nearby frontier between two cultures, the US and Mexico. But at the same time the windows themselves function as a kind of frontier as well, between inside and outside. Inside lies the cultural and institutional world of the museum and outside the marvelous beach and ocean shore. The visitor of the museum is put in an ambiguous situation because one sees the beautiful view in part only through the huge letters *BIENVENIDO,* which are running across the floors. These letters are both a visual and a linguistic device. This work is perfectly in situ and ex situ. Did you conceptualize the work as this kind of interface between private and public

space, what you have called the "inclusive" experience in and exteriorized feeling of the space?

JK Let me put it this way. As the linguistic sibling of the happy face, *Bienvenido* decorates cultural frontiers while at the same time referring to international standards of misrepresentation. In its singular form, *Bienvenido* describes the generic alien. As a supergraphic, this sublime byline continues to operate as an abusive password to colonialism. This 610 × 71–cm cliché-cum-supergraphic wraps completely around the two ocean-view elevations of the museum's architecture in a manner formally dependent upon and fractured by its fenestration. Applied to the inside surface of the glass, the fragmented image maintains a partial legibility of billboardism for the passerby, and at the same time raises certain allegorical objections to the desire for the ideal (view), from within the institutional experience.

MB This work is also critical in an almost ironic way because it is a fact that Spanish people do not enter into this embodiment of American power and culture and are not so much *bienvenido.* Were you particularly interested in bringing this political meaning into a supposedly neutral architectural structure like the museum?

JK Absolutely.

MB In May 1991, you arranged several doormats in a straight line. Each one represented a Native American "tepee." Gradually this image of a tent transforms itself into a midwestern American farm structure, which can signify the cultural standardization, so to speak, of indigenous people. Does this shift from the image to the logotype or the signaletic sign induce the symbolic loss of territory?

JK More accurately, this project is composed of eleven 1 × 1.4–m coco doormats, installed in the floor and along a single line perspective from the gallery's entry to the rear wall. A computerized narrative presents a symbolic metamorphosis from one cultural derivative (nomadic) to another (sedimentary). I would say that the shift from image to a signaletic sign induces the symbolic loss of life.

MB Why did you choose the format of the doormat for this piece? Because it functioned as a partition of a domesticated space, which could by the same token be seen as a figuration of the progressive domestication

of the savage "Indian" country? It is an object we can put underfoot and once again it marks a threshold between two spaces, inside and outside—and between two ways of conceiving space and dealing with space, ultimately resulting in genocide.

JK Savage aside, what you say is aptly stated. However, what I would consider to be of greater symbolic importance is the application of a technocratic representation of cultural history.

MB It seems to me that all your work is related to the idea of territory as an emblematic figuration of power (political, cultural, visual). Because space is becoming a mental territory it can be seen like a map with historical and political stratifications. The world of art is a world of images and you get a hold of them to turn their pure monadic appearance into what the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze has called a *rhizome,* that is to say not an arborescence of meanings, but a horizontal extension of the field of sensitive and perceptual knowledge. Do you agree with that view?

JK The philosophical eloquence with which you summarize the issues surrounding my work is no less than fascinating. Yet I don't think I would have the tendency to eulogize my activities in such terms.

The Irresistible Appeal of Utility*

Birgit Pelzer

Newly translated from the French by André Rottmann

I Tripartite—The Hague—USA—Cuba

In 1991, John Knight accepted an invitation from Stroom (The Hague's Center for Visual Arts) to participate in the city's official program of art in public space. It involved producing works specifically for particular areas of The Hague, addressing the city's history, characteristics, and emblems. Fourteen artists from the United States and Europe were chosen by Stroom based on previous works operating outside of the museum's confines.

Over the course of the project's preparation, the city was divided into sections for the invited artists to focus on; however, the artists were at once prohibited from intervening in the center of The Hague. For his proposal John Knight sought to condense certain particularities of the Netherlands: Calvinism, a sense of liberalism regarding social projects, the intensive use of the bicycle, and finally, a particular dedication to design.

On the postcard announcing his project, he explained:

> As a result of an extenuated natural habitat, both the frog, a sublime and critical link in the food chain, and the stork, one of Holland's most endeared national treasures and the official seal of The Hague, teeter on the brink of extinction. In response to this occurrence, I

> had a new, alternative bicycle bell produced, which peddles to a different tune. Instead of the familiar tingling, the phonic reflection of a frog can be heard.

I.1 Animal Crossings

His proposal thus involved commissioning an industrial designer to engineer and mass-produce a new bicycle bell; additionally, Knight planned to create an advertising campaign to inform the public about the modes of acquisition and exchange of that new model.

It is surprising to note that in the history of design, this object—one of the most common in Holland—had undergone hardly any stylistic innovation. In fact, John Knight's bell represents its first significant restyling since pre–World War II.[1] Slightly larger than standard, the new bell consists of recycled preexisting elements.[2] The outer transparent shell is attached to a metallic mechanism with a stainless steel disk onto which the figure of a stork has been inscribed.[3] Moreover, the monogram *JK* is engraved on the transparent shell's base. Which logotype of a stork to choose? In a mimetic gesture, John Knight opted to appropriate the present graphic rendition of the stork as it is found on The Hague's official seal, which in one form or another has symbolically represented the city and its regulations since the seventeenth century. Signifying civic propriety, the same graphic code appears in an endless number of public sites and on a variety of materials, including post and police stations, sanitation equipment, cultural institutions, and tourist information points. This seal, which is reminiscent of signs indicating potential animal crossings, can also been seen on street signs alerting drivers to slow down. John Knight's bell itself becomes the vehicle of an official signature.

Instead of the ting-a-ling of a standard bell, this warning apparatus emits a sound akin to that of a croaking frog. The sound certainly evokes the figure of this hopping creature, at once ordinary and legendary, which in a thousand-and-one ambivalent variations populates fairy tales, fables, and proverbs.[4] At the same time, the stork engraved on the bell's top reminds of the migratory, long-billed bird that wings its way through dreams and legends. As the text on the postcard suggests, the choice of the stork as an emblem and the frog as a sound brings together two species threatened with extinction in Holland. Furthermore, as the stork

John Knight, *The Campaign,* 1992–1993, detail. Courtesy: The artist and Stroom Den Haag, the Netherlands. Photo: Nico Zwart.

lives off toads, they are linked by a food chain in an ecosystem increasingly endangered by unbalanced biotopes and the incidents and excrescences of urban traffic.

I.2 To Be or Not to Be a Frog, a Bell, a Work of Art

The elaborate task to transpose the croaking of a frog into a mass-produced bicycle bell was entrusted to industrial designers. After countless experiments, Teake Bulstra of DMD B.V., Rotterdam (Dit Jonge Bureau—Development Manufacturing Distribution),[5] developed a mechanism that produced a metallic rattle close to a frog's croak: the sound resulting from elements set in motion by two plates striking fixed points created a facsimile of sorts. Regarding the production of this bell, it was John Knight's desire to obtain a functional object, not just some useless acoustic toy. The sound is a mechanical noise reminiscent of a frog's call, not identical to it. You hear a frog and you don't. Hence the intention was to create a simulacra, not a trick. Nevertheless, the Society for the Protection of Animals and the Animal Ambulance Service

both sounded the alarm. They were concerned that this bell, which resembles a mating and courtship signal, would draw frogs and toads out of the grassy places where they hide, thus provoking a batrachian massacre.[6] As a result, this bell, intended to protect living beings from harm, would in effect upset the animal kingdom, posing a menace rather than offering security.

So is it permissible to croak rather than ring? After all, the function of a bell is to warn, to guarantee safety. According to article 79 of the Regulations for Road Traffic, a bicycle bell must be audible at a distance of twenty-five meters, or eighty feet.[7] Is a bell still a bell, whether it croaks or rings? Whether it croaks or rings matters little as long as we can hear it eighty feet away, and provided we identify this sound as that of a bell's ring. At what particular moment are we allowed to call a bell a bell, and when exactly does a bell stop being one?

I.3 "Een Kwak-bel Is Een Must"

Prior to putting the new bell into circulation, an advertising campaign was mounted. During one month before the inauguration, in May 1993, posters were placed on the exterior ad panels of twenty-five buses which traveled throughout the city. Other posters were pasted at bicycle lots near train stations. To launch the new bell, they sported versified slogans such as "Een Kwak-bel is een must. De Haagse Ooievaar weer gerust" ("A Quack bell is a must. The Hague stork can have peace of mind") or "Met een kikker op je stuur is een Cubaanse fietsbel met meer duur" ("With a frog on your steer, a Cuban bike bell is not expensive anymore").

The phone number of Stroom prominently appeared on these posters—callers reached a prerecorded message informing about the terms and conditions of the project. As a result of the advertising campaign, the office of The Hague's Center for Visual Arts was transformed into a social services center, a storage space, a store that provided information and was in charge of distribution and mobilization.

Concerning the distribution and destination of the new bicycle bell, the back side of the aforementioned postcard offered further contractual explanation. Presented in either Dutch or Spanish, depending on the mailer's destination, John Knight's text announced,

John Knight, *The Campaign,* 1992–1993, detail. Courtesy: The artist and Stroom Den Haag, the Netherlands. Photo: Rob Kollaard.

> After the completion of the first three thousand bells, Stroom, acting as a liaison center, will offer the alternative bell to the general public, in exchange for their own. In doing so, a potential eco-political process is initiated, when the collected bells are then shipped to Cuba, where they will provide a utilitarian support to its newly established cycling culture. Simultaneously, the alternative bells attached to the Dutch bicycles will operate, both as a safety device and signifier of political solidarity. As an eventuality, for every kwak heard along the quay, a corresponding timbre will be echoed on the paseos of Havana.[8]

The front side of the postcard presented a photograph of a cobblestone square, surrounded by colonial architecture, in the old town of Havana, Cuba. Featured in the middle of the otherwise empty square is a child playfully teetering on an adult's bicycle. This motif, which registers a moment of unbalance, deliberately exudes a sense of nostalgia. At the same time the postcard evokes the commercial lures of tourism—predicated on carefully prescribed doses of pictorial disorientation—as it traffics in clichés, images of exoticism, utopia, and romance borrowed from the repertoire of neocolonialism.

John Knight, *The Campaign*, 1992–1993, detail. Photo: Kurt Dillon.

Each recipient of a new bell also received John Knight's postcard, a copy of the journal of The Hague's Center for Visual Arts, and a removable advertisement to be hung from each bicycle's handlebar over the course of some days. This handlebar ad refers to those notices found on the outside door knobs of hotel rooms—together with the postcard, publication, and bus placard, it formed a part of an overall advertising and marketing scheme, aimed at prompting other cyclists to equally exchange their bicycle bell for the new one.

I.4 Transferabilities

As items to be exchanged without currency, the bells initiated a barter system. A frog bell could be obtained gratuitously by exchanging it for an existing bell in good working order. However, if no exchangeable bell was available, one could be purchased for the price of a new bell. All of the money collected was immediately reinvested in more standard bells by Stroom. Immediately inscribed into this mode of operation is an

economic game of supply, demand, and distribution. In total, three thousand bells would be fabricated, though additional numbers could be produced on demand. The contract drawn up by the artist cited legal terms. By formulating rules of convertibility, he adapted the conditions whereby an object might access the sphere of trade, conditions that would render it transferable.

John Knight's bell is the object of a barter. If you want one, you must trade one. The antithesis of sale and purchase is effectively erased.[9] The conversion standard proves to be the object itself. The gesture of exchange operates like a procedure signaling agreement and a solidarity of opinion.

I.5 Protocols

On May 18, 1993, the day of the official opening of the Stroom Center for Visual Arts, the so-called burgomaster of The Hague presided over the public presentation of the project *De Campagne*. This also was the moment that the distribution of Knight's bell was inaugurated. The chief magistrate, as the official representative of the city authorities, would be the first citizen to exchange her regular bell for this alternative version.[10] Her ecologically minded, inoffensive act of solidarity nonetheless departed from the directives of international embargo policy against Cuba.

Insofar as the Dutch bells collected were bound for Cuba, the operation in fact jeopardized the embargo decreed on this destination by the United States of America. The bells were shipped to Cuba regardless. John Knight notified

> that a formal arrangement had been made between the Cuban Embassy in The Hague and Stroom. In fact, when the Cuban ambassador became aware of the project, she most kindly offered her services. And, although there were reasons, the bells were shipped by sea via the embassy directly to the Union of Young Communists. Remember, it is precisely because the Netherlands has a good relationship with Cuba that the tripartite aspect of the work was conceived. The general embargo exists primarily between the United States and Cuba.[11]

On April 4, 1994, in the spring of the year after the bells had first been presented in The Hague, they were distributed in Cuba during a National Holiday entitled "Communist Youth Day." This celebration entailed a large number of demonstrations across the island over the course of several days. As John Knight explains,

> The entire operation of my action was handled by La Union de Jovenes Comunistas, or, as they are known in their abbreviated form, the UJC. That is to say, my action was planned, presented and distributed, with my consent, as a part of the greater events. After a specific celebration, on April 5, where the action was initially and symbolically presented with the distribution of some 500 bells complete with announcement postcards, to the community of Las Arboledas, Havana, the 2500 remaining bells were distributed by the UJC throughout the country.

He adds,

> Although the arrangements for the final celebration/distribution were carried out by the UJC, the original idea was developed in conjunction with the Center for Cuban Studies in New York, the Grupo para el Desarrollo Integral de la Capital in Havana, and myself.[12]

According to inquiries made at the embassy of the Netherlands in Brussels in August 1994, it would appear to be stretching the point to qualify the diplomatic relations between Cuba and the Netherlands as good. Just like the other member states of the European Community, the Netherlands followed a policy of abstention toward the embargo; at the United Nations, for instance, the Netherlands vote neither pro nor con. Also, relations with Cuba are limited to emergency humanitarian aid and to authorizing contacts with Cuba that any individual, be he or she a business person or artist, may wish to develop on his or her own initiative. To date, however, no official initiative has been forthcoming from the Netherlands or any other European country.

With regard to relations with the United States, the massive exodus of Cuban refugees is currently causing an "easing" of restrictions: there even is, on either side, a desire to review immigration policies. The

United States declare they are willing to newly discuss the embargo to the extent that the Cuban government in turn declares its willingness to free political prisoners, to hold democratic elections, and to initiate democratic reforms.

I.6 Asphyxiation

Due to the American embargo and the breakup of trade relations with the former USSR and affiliated member-states of the Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), Cuba faced a particularly sensitive shortage, among other supply crises,[13] in petroleum. Under these circumstances, the bicycle was promoted as an indispensable means of transportation. Its omnipresence has become the most visible sign of a profoundly altered state of affairs, an economic and political crisis that neither can be brought to a halt nor patched up easily. In military parades, for instance, bicycles are used to pull anti-aircraft batteries. Army troops parade on bikes in default of other vehicles.

John Knight, *The Campaign,* 1992–1993, detail. Photo: Rafael Perez (ANP).

As we are informed by an American cycling magazine in 1991,[14] these Cuban bikes are "made in China" and bear bird names such as *Phoenix* and *Flying Pigeon*. They are imported in kits containing loose pieces and then assembled by students working for not much more than a pittance during their vacations. However, Cuba is currently expanding three local factories to cope with the shortage.

Eugenio Balari, the chairman of the Cuban Institute of Research and Orientation of Internal Demand, and an ardent as well as longtime supporter of the bicycle, enumerates the six advantages of "this truly noble vehicle" as follows: bicycles primarily save energy; they are both practical and handy; they help to protect the environment because they cause no pollution; they are less noisy and contribute to the tranquility of the city; they provide exercise and thus further the health; they lift people's spirits because they allow a beautiful perspective of the city, free from the bumpy cage of a car.[15] Consequently, the construction of cycling paths has increased enormously.[16]

I.7 Thresholds

John Knight's response to the invitation to produce a work in public space thus was to put into circulation a small, functional, reproducible object that itself is attached to a mobile item and that produces a noise supposedly ensuring safety in city traffic, a warning sound of the cyclist's passage and travel. This project operates on the level of the most quotidian gesture, routine, nearly unnoticeable. The work defies stasis as it circulates and virtually emerges everywhere. Instead of the more or less eminent or monumental placement of an object, the project is distinguished by a sense of perpetual displacement that appears random and planned at the same time.

Yet this almost imperceptible "public sculpture"—that is unpredictable in its bearings and cannot be entirely grasped in its apparitions—plays with a system of thresholds and prohibitions: even though the pitch of the bell is a shrill kind of tinkle, it is deeper in tone than required by standard bells. Moreover, John Knight's proposal thwarts the official ban on producing a work in The Hague's city center. Finally, the benign delivery of bells produced in the Netherlands within an artistic context transgresses the embargo decreed on Cuba. Thus at various levels, the constraints aimed at obstructing the free circulation of an object here are

impeded, hindered, and foiled. Furthermore, this more-or-less gratuitous bell neutralizes the imponderability of the price attached to an artwork, the financial excitement grafted to this type of object, even though it never truly complies with the laws of trade.

Furthermore, John Knight questioned certain aspects of the overall project. Those responsible at Stroom, according to him, sought to distinguish themselves from the widespread practice that allows artists to build a career based on cultural commissions, the very commissions that tend to support the same names over and over.[17] In order to make distance from this logic, the organizers proposed the *De Campagne* project, and selected artists whose work articulates a sociopolitical critique of public space; yet the latter were chosen to promote the ideology of the former. Countering this expectation, John Knight emphasized that there is no situation offside. Those responsible at Stroom as well as the participating artists claim to articulate a position of political dissent from the dominant culture, but they all form an integral part of the given cultural system, its frame, and institutional perspectives. Consequently, they all will be included in John Knight's project. So he formulates his proposal by using this cultural infrastructure in order to introduce a new form of public service. The Center for Visual Arts is transformed into a center for the distribution of a small useful object, of a product, and the public turns to it as it would to an office responsible for that kind of distribution. As a result, the artist redirects and diverts the bureaucracy of art into an effective office for social action and political solidarity. With this strategy of diversion, he attempts to subvert an operational method and a discourse. This discourse, in Knight's view, bears the positivist stamp of social liberalism, which also carries military connotations—as evidenced by the title *De Campagne* itself, the ideas of general quarters, sectors of intervention, a base of operation, an air of militancy.

II Offers of Services

John Knight's action in The Hague addresses a field of social interactions, a system of exchange between two cultures that are antagonistic in terms of the global division of north versus south, yet are drawn together by a common denominator—the intensive use of bicycles. This action, as always departing from the invitation to operate within a given context, sharpens and articulates a critical reflection of services, in leisure, tourism,

design, their respective points of attraction, modes of anaclisis, and concomitant mechanisms of suggestion: advertisements, seals, logotypes, copyright, signature. The question of the status of the manufactured object, its circulation in the market, its social repercussions, as well as social divisions that are maintained and reproduced are reminiscent of other projects by John Knight in other exhibition contexts.

This practice, which throws into relief the shift from an economy of production to an economy of services, intends to be a critical tool, "a good cure for the malady of subjugation."[18] Stemming from the logic of situational works, for which the actual site and its external as well institutional conditions provide the framework and the motivation, the work provides us with a view of the current state of affairs. Its ambition lies in the destabilization of such a node of ideological consensus. Playing with the lures and decoys of conventions and shared assumptions, the work of John Knight addresses the veiled but coercive violence of an order characterized by symbolic constraint by making certain invisible conjunctions tangible. Unlike the works of Minimal and Land Art, these explorations of crossings and circuits depart from the insight that they intrinsically adhere to a culture of exploitation. Within these geographical exchanges, he makes this culture meet exactly what it condemns or secludes, rules out, and encloses like a menace.

A number of John Knight's projects question the hierarchies between official and vernacular languages. In 1990, at the Galerie Roger Pailhas in Paris, his work entitled *There's No Place Like Home* in this way presented an alphabetical index of North American place names according to their ancient indigenous appellation; some of these names, printed in bold letters, were additionally recited in that particular language in a continuous audio recording that accompanied the work. The work entitled *Huchal,* which was produced for an exhibition at La Criée in Rennes in 1991, consisted of a color video—projected as a loop measuring 4 × 5 meters—showing a child learning to conjugate the verb *crier,* yet not in French but in the indigenous dialect; therefore, the child conjugates the Breton word *huchal.*

II.1 Emblems

Engaging with the issues of tourism, design, and leisure, the practice of John Knight creates cultural, linguistic, and geographical crossings. These

John Knight, *Huchal,* 1992, installation view, La Criée, Halle d'Art Contemporain, Rennes, France.

intersections—and the divisions and separations they in fact rely on—are particularly manifest in the series of postcards designed by the artist to announce his exhibitions. These postcards form an integral part of his work. As the aforementioned Havana postcard already made clear, they display components of exoticism, the sugarcoating of the unknown, notions of nostalgia and utopia, in short the trivial poeticizing of consumerism: attraction, staging, seduction, and stylization—the real structure of domination is here concealed most effectively. Economic liberalism in particular distills and masks conflicts, covers the incompatibility of interests. Regarding these ambivalent intersections John Knight comments,

> In the general sense, people do not have the tendency to consider design a self-contained ideology, but simply a mechanical operation. I happen to disagree. Posed as a mild-mannered reporter on positivist behavior, "design for better living" is actually a prefabricated mechanism for capital domination. It is possibly the most cleverly devised lubricant used in the linkage between early industrial colonialism and multinational hegemony, the fossil fuel of modernity. It is the monster that stands upon the heads of aboriginal culture.

He continues,

> I'm concerned with the phenomena of and the need for the continued existence of indigenous societies around the world. Therefore, I am interested in the problems that occur between multinational exchange and their subordinating effects.[19]

The fact that tourism and design participate in a certain industrial logic associated with the conjunctions of advertising and services is brought to the fore, made palpable, and explored by doubling their own techniques. In this respect John Knight's work operates along the axis of an attempt to identify the cogs in the impact of advertising, from which no artistic production can exempt itself. So he isolates the coordinates of the emblem and seal, of the copyright, monogram, name, and signature in order to outline the modes of credibility and authenticity codified therein. The object, in figurative terms, is brought back to the very sign that codes it, the idea of value accordingly to exactly the sign bearing the marks of value. In this procedure of questioning the use of emblems and signs, Knight experiments with notions of uniqueness and mass production, with the multiple and the rarified single item.

John Knight's *Marque Déposée,* a work conceived for the project of three simultaneous individual exhibitions by *Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, John Knight* at the Roger Pailhas Gallery in Marseille in 1988, thus took on the form of a full-color, offset tourist poster of Marseille. However, it only exists in a unique copy based on a photograph the artist took of the shopping district in which the gallery was located. Superimposed onto this image is the word *Marseille* in capital letters; in the place usually reserved for a trademark figures the monogram *JK.* The procedures of the photograph and poster, both of which implying the multiple, are at once evoked and annihilated.

Prior to this work, the *JK* reliefs presented as an untitled project at documenta 7 in Kassel in 1982 did not operate with a single copy of a poster, but with the appropriation of several travel posters. These posters were wrapped around the initials *JK,* covering them almost completely. The artist's monogram, literally thrown into relief, functioned as nothing but the support for tourist advertisements. As the posters espoused the outlines of the monogram, the advertising images are fragmented; they are turned into mere packaging materials. The relief *JK* turns into a

logotype, an advertising tool, a commercial brand. Yet at the same time the message of the travel posters is rendered nearly illegible.

These repercussions of the monogram and logotype, as well as of the linking between the unique and the multiple, would be taken up again by Knight in 1983, at the Renaissance Society in Chicago. The installation *Museotypes* consisted of a collection of sixty gold-trimmed, bone china plates. In the center of each plate is a cobalt-blue miniaturized abstraction of an international museum's ground plan—different each time, yet ultimately interchangeable.[20] The allusion to the corporate logo returns in *Mirror Series* (1986–), which stigmatizes the network of influence at work in the fabrication of figures of authority, the very mystification that here again is doubled in Knight's recourse to personalized signs. Several subsequent projects should not go unmentioned either, for instance Knight's appropriation of the emblem of the American Academy in Rome in his project *Il Diritto All'Ozio—The Right to Be Lazy*—created for the 1987 group exhibition *Non in Codice;* the geological sign for uranium transposed into a decorative carpet motif for the installation entitled *Łeetsoii* at the Hoshour Gallery, Albuquerque, in 1988; in *Federal Style,* first shown at the Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, he employed casts drawn from topographical reliefs maps of indigenous Native American reservations that advanced to become emblems of territorial possession.[21] In the case of The Hague, the stork emblem-cum-crest of the city is conflated with the *JK* monogram. The copyright here appears to indicate authenticity as much as exclusive data. To offer Dutch bicycle bells to Cuba also raises the question as to the means by which the so-called Third World can effectively construct economies based on the most exclusive data of the capitalist world order.[22]

By way of this diverse and acerbic recourse to emblems, John Knight punctuates a field of social interactions, and the nodes at which art and nonart meet, the interferences between the spheres of private and public, the relationship between dominant and subordinate culture, and the relentless economic reality perpetuated therein. In fact, his projects question the ambiguity of the emblem, its always already distorted mark as it is placed within the system, but in a place said to be detached from it, as if at a remove. Knight's works reveal the extent to which the emblem bears a contradictory value because it allows one to proceed toward the field of the Other, by being represented and recognized in it;

but it equally allows one to proceed in this direction with the will to be stripped bare, incomplete and deficient, to be alone in this field—a virtual cancellation of the Other.[23]

II.2 Domestic Functions

The objects created by John Knight insert themselves into the familiar, the quotidian, the domestic spaces of consumption and decoration. At the same time, they distance themselves both from the legacies of the ready-made and Pop art, from the common recourse to the object that occurred in the art of the 1980s.[24] This stance does not entail the *détournement* of a benign functional object. Rather, Knight's objects retain their potential use value. His objects remain purveyors of services and domestic functions, but these functions are at once overexposed and dispersed—evidenced in his work by carpenters' levels, plates, mirrors, lounge chairs, carpeting, magazine subscriptions, bicycle bells.[25] Nevertheless, these innocuous objects, stemming for the most part from the realm of design, eventually may enter a private collection. They question the insidious moment at which art and nonart coincide, private and public spheres merge and separate—that very locus at which an object can become a fetish.[26]

By stretching time frames, functions, and routines, and through the emphasis put on the diversion of activities and leisure, John Knight stresses the status of the object as a social condenser and the consequent distribution of the places and roles of the artist, collector, and museum, as well as the contextual evaluations and devaluations that attest to them. Thus, in the untitled project known under the working title *Journals Series,* initiated in 1977 and still ongoing, lifestyle periodicals dealing with interior decoration, cooking, art, fashion, nature, and leisure—promoting "how to live" and "how to live better"—are purposefully sent out to a selection of collectors, critics, artists, and art lovers with regard to the recipients' tastes, occupations, and personal idiosyncrasies. Using subscriptions so to intrude the private sphere of mail, unsolicited mail even,[27] John Knight operates with inversions of function: magazines virtually attain the status of an artwork, the artist becomes the sponsor of his own work. This reversal is arrived at by way of an octroi through which the logic of choice is effectively inverted.[28]

Thus the artist situates himself on the inside of an economic system. In The Hague, and as we shall see in his work for the exhibition *AL(L)-READY MADE,*[29] the exchange he proposes is a barter, the immediate material convertibility of one object into another, so that one witnesses a vertigo of exchange.

III The Principle of Utility and Its Paradox

One of the variables in John Knight's action in The Hague is to implement an offer of services. The offer in this case consists of the industrial production and mass distribution of a useful object. By this means, John Knight quotes and remodels a long Modernist tradition of functional art, an art under the banner of technology and subject to its laws.[30] But he proceeds in a spirit of irony,[31] questioning art's symbolic stakes, allegiances, and economic purposes. The different operations of John Knight's oeuvre, as far as the conception, distribution, and the exchange without currency of a functional object are concerned, prompts us to reflect on the principle of utility.

In fact, the project in The Hague presupposes a recourse to the principle of utility. This utility principle is secured by its foundation in science: there is something irreducible said to represent the happiness of each and every one. It is the notion, as set forth by Jeremy Bentham, founder of utilitarianism, of the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people—the principle in whose name he would establish a hedonistic calculation of moral ends.[32]

The utility principle is in turn kept up by the exchange of goods. The function of exchange in fact declares a compatibility of utilities based on the following axiom: everything useful is useful to you.[33] The axiom constructs a law of interdependence and interchangeability of everything profitable. Therefore the utility principle implies that things must be produced and that all things produced must be useful. Furthermore, the thing produced is seen from the angle of effect, in accordance with its laws. Everything "must be usable, must work toward a result."[34] Consequently, all things are defined as being "relative." This definition establishes a more or a less, a maximizer and a minimizer,[35] a hierarchy of effects. The hierarchy of effects can be inventoried, measured, and categorized, and therefore is exhaustive, sprawling, and exponential. All

things must be arranged in their proper place. The process of division and subdivision cannot be carried too far.[36]

The principle of utility hence gives rise to a compatibility of services, a calculation of losses and profits, and an adjustment of utilities and expenditures. "All activity is to be analyzed in terms of movement: all movement is expenditure and all expenditure must be productive."[37] The principle is then defined not only by its effects and results but also above all by its productivity, its yield or output. Nothing, here, is done in vain; all loss must be diminished, even avoided. All things must not only be of use, they must be of use several times over. Potentially, every object is an accumulator, a transformer of numerous utilities. There especially should be no remains! It is noteworthy that it is this type of logic that the paradigm of the ready-made, in the spirit of approval, stems from. It is precisely this logic that John Knight takes on, as we shall see, in his project for the 1992 exhibition entitled *AL(L)READY MADE.* He points out the effects of the recycling of the banal, because it is commonly championed by this paradigm against the rarefying forces of the museum—a strategy of recontextualization that nevertheless leaves in its wake nothing but "a plethora of antithetical commodities."[38]

The basic principle that all things are defined as "relative" means that nothing simply is what it appears to be. No activity has its end in itself. Everything must be related to something other than itself. All things may be replaced, appropriated, diverted, manipulated, and all are validated and valorized by appropriation. What here emerge are the contours of the registers of the determined and the functional—functionality defined as rendering an application or a service operational. This reasoning also turns up in the dominant theoretical discourse in contemporary art, in the psychology that infiltrates and imbues it: "At the outset, the psychologist shows himself as being incapable of conceiving of anything whatsoever in the human experience that serves no purpose: everything is situation, determining, conditioning."[39] So what resonance, what action remains company to this despotic principle of utility, to the justification through function, through the effectiveness of sense and content, in modern and contemporary aesthetic ideology—the very realm that prides itself to be particularly acute and critical, having rejected the inoperative and fallacious concepts of autonomy, essence, and self-referentiality?

In fact, the principle of utility is backed up by a paradox. Its paradox is that "it transforms something essentially relative—use—into an absolute."[40] This is what emerges from aporia. All one can do then is to account for a surge of forces related to utility, the unleashing of the imperatives of function, yield, and output—the ferocious reign of the sale or nonsale of labor, and its inverse, the rise of segregation, exclusion, and racism.[41]

How to object to utility, to all that is useful? This principle is part of the discourse of the master that pioneered the discourse of capital:[42] it locates agency only relative to the enfeoffment of the other. It establishes feasible operations, tidy relations, relations that are explicable, authorized, but it at the same atomizes social relations.

IV Ready-made for Hire

Exchange is thus scaffolded by a principle of utility, but use value itself is impregnated with artifice. John Knight questions this artifice that is created by capitalism, the "secret" of the commodity, this blind spot of fetishism. The difficulty, however, lies in the fact that it is not enough to expose the blind spot, give away or expound the "secret," and reveal what is concealed and hidden. Rather we need to take a glimpse of the process that results from John Knight's stance vis-à-vis one of the dominant paradigms: the ready-made.

In 1992, he agreed to participate in a group exhibition entitled *AL(L)READY MADE* at the Kruithuis, Hertogenbosch. On this occasion, he would articulate his position concerning the paradigm deriving from the work of Marcel Duchamp along two axes: the context of the exhibition and the museum's "Artothèque" program. Situating his work in an economic society based on commodity contracts, and pursuing the overriding questions of the exchange of objects and their endless flow, John Knight posited an act of institutional interpretation; he enlarged, as if under a magnifying glass, the question of services, in this case their programming and organization inside a museum context that entails an Artothèque allowing to loan art objects.

In the exhibition catalog, published in the form of a diary for the year 1993, he positions himself vis-à-vis the ready-made paradigm, and the validation process it implies—a process predicated on the very idea of a variety of value:

> If, hypothetically speaking, it is possible to construct a lineage between the readymade paradigm of low-high and the Artothèque-type of contextual devaluation (high-low), is there then a revised position, beyond Duchamp and the subsequent works of its influence, as represented in this exhibition, that might be posed?
>
> As one of those artists clearly influenced by that same historical thesis, let me offer the following ecological proposal, in an attempt to exegesis, rather than perpetuate, the mystical order of history.[43]

The exhibition *AL(L)READY MADE,* organized by museum curator Jos Poodt, was premised on Duchamp's "urinal." Works were selected both according to the concept of the ready-made and ceramics as artistic material. John Knight refused to again exhibit the plates of *Museotypes* as the invitation had suggested. Instead, he proposed a new critical project. During a visit to the museum in preparation of the exhibition, he developed the idea to have his project depart from the Artothèque program—a service by which the museum offers works from its collection for hire. The Artothèque proposes a loan in exchange for an annual fee. The program also ensures that certain artists in the institution's holdings contractually agree to have the museum lend their works to the public. The result is an extreme heterogeneity and circulation of objects that are offered for hire: the vitrine displaying those objects thus presents a spectrum ranging from craft items to art works, from decorative arts, such as jewelry, to painting and sculpture. These loans—serving diverse purposes and effectual over periods of time negotiated on each occasion—are available to private individuals, civic organizations, and business corporations.

In turn, John Knight established a loan contract with the Artothèque. In a critical play on words, he called his work *Ecoaesthetics*. The contract stipulated that throughout the duration of the *AL(L)READY MADE* exhibition, anyone who desired to do so could exchange "an object (ceramics) from their own 'collection' (life),"[44] for a work from the Artothèque program. These contractually exchanged objects would then be exhibited, for the duration of the respective loans, in the museum, as a part of John Knight's work. Consequently, there were different frequencies, an extreme and unpredictable fluctuation of objects over the course of the exhibition's run. "As a result, each time a work of the museum's collection (containing the institution's 'aura')

enters into the public environment, an object from that same private/public realm is subjected to the legacy of Duchamp."[45] The process actually included a broad range of effects, from objects of affection executed in the style of childhood's "innocent eye" to a sort of "salon des refusés" as local artists used Knight's proposal to gain access to a museum framework from which they are ordinarily excluded.

This work of John Knight thus comprised a number of elements specific to his practice, such as the impact of emblems, intersections between the aura of the institution and other cultural contexts, the implementation of institutional services entailing new responsibilities, the use of exchange agreements regarding objects, and an extreme variety concerning the participation of a larger public.

John Knight, *Ecoaesthetics,* 1992, installation view, *AL(L)READY MADE,* Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst, Het Kruithuis, Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands. Photo: P. v. d. Kruis.

In the framework of the exhibition, Knight's project, by simple juxtaposition, created an extraordinary disparity and continuous flux of objects, participations, and sources, as well as a great diversity of motivations and decision-making processes as to the choice of objects that were suggested and exhibited. Furthermore, John Knight's project—by virtue of its mere contiguity to the inert alignment of objects in the rest of the show—offered a scathing exposure of the contributions of the other artists taking part in *AL(L)READY MADE* with newly made ceramic objects; for them it obviously was important to be associated with a legacy, to belong, collaborate, compete, cooperate, to be featured and to join forces with, and above all, to take part in the aura of the institution.

In this proposal, the artist once again achieved to give substance to an obsolete form of exchange, from object to object. This exchange does away with currency, accumulation, and diversion, and instead elicits, animates, and amplifies the saturated flow of things produced. It strips and voids what monetary circulation invariably tends to keep out of sight: surplus value. Where does it go? And what is it, exactly?

Regarding this function of surplus value, the circulation of goods includes, to be precise, a flaw, a point of ignorance, of "nonsavoir" that allows the character to be just as imperceptible and to forever incite its lure, its potential of illusion. The acts posited by John Knight grapple with an illusion, all the while he is aware that the knowledge that ought to dispel the illusion does not undo it, does not dispel it at all. However, it reconstructs itself elsewhere.

V The Rejoicings of the Grand Market

In the project at The Hague, as in other works, John Knight stigmatizes the ideology of free enterprise. His procedures of inclusion and alignment, juxtaposition and interference, attempt to outline whatever falls off the market, is removed from trade and traffic, from the abduction of territories and places, whatever alienates and separates—the possession of some causes the dispossession of others. His operations lead us to the very heart of the capitalist discourse, to the heart of the status of the worker-cum-consumer, and to the heart of the untenable promise on which this system is built. We are brought to the point at which we ask ourselves what makes the capitalist laugh, and, following the claims of

Pierre Bruno, what does make the proletariat not laugh at all.[46] Certainly, it must be stated that in a so-called postindustrial society, in which labor itself has undergone dramatic changes, the relentless process elucidated and thoroughly revealed by Marx has not been canceled out at all. The sprawling capitalist discourse defines, well and truly, the civilization that is our own. In the way it reflects on the interactions among advertising, tourism, leisure, and design, the work of John Knight aims at certain repercussions of this process.

Let us bear in the mind that in the analysis of Marx, to which Lacan has responded by isolating and reformulating its logic,[47] one of the operations of capitalism lies in the transformation of the worker into a commodity. More precisely, into what the worker sells, his labor force. And so, labor force is not labor itself. It is an abstract entity that is no more than a unit of value, and as such, it may be accounted for—to be added to or subtracted from what has been accumulated. The worker is reduced to being a value in the market—from then on he is a proletarian. Consequently, what the capitalist purchases is labor force. He becomes the owner of its use value. And so the use value of this force creates wealth, because its unit of value is relative to the production of an object—a product made from a loss, "sur-travail," for which the worker receives no wage and which is the object of an additional value.

Something therefore is veiled or masked in the operation of sale and purchase: the function of surplus value, its destination, the profit made through surplus. The capitalist laughs.[48] In fact, labor force is purchased and invariably paid less than what it produces. The resilience of the strategy that reduces labor to labor force, and thus to a commodity, is based on the fact that it is possible to purchase something that always produces more than it receives and is paid for.

As a result, something is elided in the profit of this force. All the more so as both the proletarian and the capitalist are alienated: we might in fact say that the capitalist chooses to renounce the use of his wealth in order to let it bear fruit, to hoard it. He renounces the possibility of enjoying his wealth and instead chooses to enhance its value. What results from this renunciation of use is that the proletarian renounces the use of his labor force and the capitalist renounces the use of his wealth.

Yet, in what pretends to be an enhancement of value, a certain cynicism is at work; there is a basic lie operative in this discourse of capital. Although they may share a common renunciation of use—both

being required of something for which wealth itself is of no use—the proletarian certainly does not occupy the same place as the capitalist. The lure or illusion by which they would both be deprived of use leads to a shameful result. It is not a renunciation of the same order, there is no renunciation both could have in common.[49] The capitalist chooses to renounce, the proletarian has no choice. Out of this opportunity of choice grows return for the capitalist that he never has to pay for. The proletarian, on the contrary, finds himself in a situation of imposed choice. He must sell his labor force in order to sustain himself, whatever the appearances of contractual freedom according to which individuals would choose only their options on the basis of carefully considered utilitarian interests. During this alleged exchange, there is something that precisely is not exchanged, but rather extorted, something that the capitalist system salvages and accumulates. Where does surplus value go?

This despoliation is itself masked and veiled by a fallacious promise: that the worker can retrieve this deal would he only consent to the sale of his labor force. He could retrieve this surplus value in the form of surplus *jouissance,* "plus-de-jouir,"[50] and in turn "take part in the rejoicings of the unique, grand market."[51] He can participate as a consumer. Indeed, the subject of consumption is that on which everything comes to rest in the discourse of capital. The mechanism operates on its "plus-de-jouir," predicated on the axiom "All capitalists."

And yet this promise is untenable. There is a hemorrhage. Its risks and its way out become apparent. The risk is that the proletarian, himself an item of consumption, a commodity, is increasingly excluded from the process of the creation of wealth as well, that he is becoming a remainder, a refuse of the system.

Therefore, the capitalist's discourse, which, according to Lacan's analysis is a partial modification of the master's discourse, has devastating consequences.[52] The circuit leads from the subject to the worker, from the worker to the proletarian, from the proletarian to the subject of consumption, from the subject of consumption to potential refuse, to a useless product, to impoverishment, and exclusion. For participation in consumption itself can only be possible for certain people, wealth being coextensive with poverty.[53]

The subject is caught in this well-lubricated circuit: as a worker, he works to produce surplus value, but as a consumer, he fuels the realization of this surplus value.[54] The more his desire is ignited, the more he

fuels it, cast as it is into the toils of the offer, of consumption, the gadgets surplus value promotes, the advertising that encourages the subject to consume even more.

Capitalist discourse in fact industrializes desires in these intersecting networks. It levels and homogenizes them by an astute administration of the methods of attraction captured in the *dispositif* of yield and output.[55] By promoting a lack of differentiation between individuals—from then on all the more prompted to stand out—it is the "cleverest discourse we have"[56] to invent such an efficiency in the exploitation of desire. "The exploitation of desire is the great invention of the capitalist discourse, because, come what may, we must call a spade a spade. The fact that we've reached a point of industrializing desire, well . . . we couldn't have come up with anything better to keep people a little quiet . . . ? . . . and what's more we got results."[57]

But the risk, the menace, then is that the subject, itself an item of consumption, may be presumed a reject, without recourse. The trap of the capitalist discourse, which involves us all—there is no other discourse—[58] is that by appearing to complete subjects through products and their promise of *jouissance,* it is only concerned with that which dissatisfies. Consume to be consumed.[59] The result of the capitalist discourse turns out to be "all proletarians." In 1974, Lacan stated, "There's only one social symptom: each individual really is a proletarian, in other words, he has no discourse how to make a social bond, otherwise, semblance."[60] Every subject—having become, as an instrument of the market, the mere equivalent of its abilities—is detached from the bond, because it struggles only with his own abilities, and with its "plus-de-jouir," without any partner.[61] What remains is what swells up and replaces the missing links: the rise of nationalism and of racism, the resurgence of segregation.[62]

Therefore, the functional ideal of the capitalist system is to complete every subject by means of objects that promise *jouissance.* The master signifier of the capitalist discourse may appear to be unassailable and unsurpassable, despising powerlessness. It is difficult to identify and locate it, if it was not for its murderous effects. Regarding the possibilities of fighting it, it is misleading to believe that the socialization of all goods and the abolition of the market would eliminate surplus value. In authoritarian societies such as Cuba, we witness another variation of the master's discourse—through shifts toward academic discourse.[63] Indeed,

knowledge finds itself in the position of an agent. It directs and issues orders. Knowledge declares itself to be omniscient about the people, the bureaucracy. It presupposes a gridlike control of the land, a muzzling of the media, thus distilling the fascination for the charismatic leader. Above all, it signifies "no-room-for-truth."[64] Authoritarian omniscience indeed establishes a condition in which the needs of everyone are just as obvious as the ways to meet them. The master's function becomes even a bit more opaque here, as do the methods of instrumentation and exploitation from which this signifier derives its strength. The question thus proves to be how to construct another discourse.

VI Here and Elsewhere

As if magnetically drawn to the production of utility, the project in The Hague proposes a new functional object circulating in public space. The public place introduces a question about exchanges and their conduits. The exchange operates with the gesture of a barter within the framework of an art institution. In order to ensure that the barter will be carried out in this specific place, John Knight's proposal has taken recourse to a particular form of communicating with the public. His procedures appropriate methods of free enterprise: marketing and advertising—but advertising here serves as an invitation to posit an act of solidarity vis-à-vis the people of Cuba. To quote the artist, "In doing so, a potential eco-political process is initiated. The bells will operate, both as a safety device and a signifier of political solidarity."[65]

The work questions the political repercussions of production systems, the attraction and the luring promise of the unique, grand market, and the effective relations of abstention, asphyxiation, blockades, and hegemony in the tripartite Netherlands—USA—Cuba.

Through the metaphor of exchange, John Knight's intervention in The Hague creates a link with a second public space, another country, yet one that has been battered—Cuba. The antithetical crossing is achieved by a common denominator: sound. Cuban legend has it that sound was born on that isle.

Notes

*This essay was written in August 1994.—Ed.

1. "Kikkergeluiden op het fietspad. John Knight en de innovatie van de fietsbel," *stroom journaal,* no. 5 (1993): 3.

2. The bell was produced by the company "Widek B.V." in Krimpen aan de Ijsseel, the Netherlands.

3. The prototype was produced using the bottom of a one-liter Coca-Cola bottle. The idea of recycling the bottoms of used bottles was discussed at length. But after it was established that there would be far too much waste and garbage, the bottom was used only to create the bell's mold. Accordingly, they opted for new plastic.

4. Thus the collection of the Brothers Grimm's fairy tales opens with "The Frog Prince, or, Iron Henry" and with the conjugation, "In old times, when wishing still helped one, ..." [*Grimm's Household Tales*, trans. Margaret Hunt (London: George Bell and Sons, 1884), 1.—Ed.] See also La Fontaine's "The Frogs Asking a King," in which the food chain leading to the stork is brought into the story. The fable evokes the "marshy folks, a foolish race and timid," who, fed up with the democratic state, live hidden under reeds and rushes, and implore a sovereign. "'We want a king,' the people said, 'to move!' The god straight sent them down a crane, who caught and slew them without measure, and gulp'd their carcasses at pleasure; whereat the frogs more wofully complain." [*The Fables of La Fontaine,* Vol. 1, Second Edition, trans. Elizur Wright Jr. (New York: William A. Colman, 1891), Book III, IV, 99–101.—Ed.].

5. "Kikkergeluiden op het fietspad," 3; "Fietsbel als ruilobject," *iON. Industrieel Ontwerpen* (May/June 1993): 10.

6. The May 27, 1993, edition of the daily newspaper *Telegraaf* thus ran the headline "Deining om kwakende fietsbel."

7. See Nico Zwart, "Rumoer," *Volkskrant,* May 21, 1993.

8. John Knight, text on the announcement card for *The Campaign,* 1993.

9. "Circulation bursts through all restrictions as to time, place, and individuals, imposed by direct barter, and this it effects by splitting up, into the antithesis of a sale and a purchase, the direct identity that in barter does exist between the alienation of one's own and the acquisition of some other man's product." Karl Marx, *Das Kapital,* Vol. 1, Part 1, Chapter III, Section 2, in *Marx-Engels Collected Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1975–2005; 1996), xxxv, 123.

10. The event was widely reported on—backed up by photographs—in the local press, for instance in the *Haagsche Courant* [January 23, 1993.—Ed.] and the *Telegraaf.*

11. John Knight, letter to the author, August 5, 1994.

12. Ibid.

13. Adding on to this fuel shortage are shortages of food, medication, spare parts, and vital basis products, as well as power cuts . . . all of which have led to considerably more than merely a brutal collapse of the Cuban people's standard of living. Rather, it has led to a state verging on paralysis and famine. It is a state in which tourism appears, to use Fidel Castro's words from December 1993, as "our main life preserver." During the recent riots in Havana, shops for tourists were the first to be attacked, accompanied by people's calls for "Libertad!" See Nicanor Leon Colayo, *Beleaguered Hope: The U.S. Economic Blockade of*

Cuba (Havana: Editorial Cultura Popular, 1991); Carlos Lage Dávila, *El desafío económico de Cuba* (Havana: Ediciones Entorno, 1992).

14. Lee Hockstader, "New Cycles in Cuba's Economy," *City Cyclist. Transportation Alternatives* (1991): 10. [*Washington Post* (August 19, 1991): A 12.—Ed.]

15. Ibid.

16. This development must appear especially irritating given the situation that has emerged in the meantime, in which the means of locomotion of many Cubans turn out to be precarious rafts and other makeshift boats used to flee the island, more often than not in vain, across the hazardous Caribbean Sea toward Florida.

17. John Knight in conversation with the author, New York, April 1994.

18. "Benzakin-Knight," in *John Knight/Haim Steinbach*, exhibition catalog (Brussels: Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1991), 27.

19. Ibid., 26.

20. See *John Knight*, exhibition catalog (Chicago: The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1983).

21. For descriptions and detailed study of the works of John Knight's mentioned here, see Anne Rorimer, "John Knight: Designating the Site," in *John Knight. Treize Travaux*, exhibition catalog (Villeurbanne: Le Nouveau Musée, 1989), 7–25 [reprinted in this volume]; Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Knight's Moves: Situating the Art/Object," in *John Knight. MCMLXXXVI*, exhibition catalog (New York: Marian Goodman Gallery, 1986), 3–20 [reprinted in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 285–304.—Ed.; reprinted in this volume]; Daniel Buren, "Essay," in *John Knight. Łeetsoii*, exhibition catalog (Albuquerque: Hoshour Gallery, 1988), n.p.; Alain Charre, "Just Another Bourgeois Villa," in *John Knight: Ex Situ*, exhibition catalog (Lyon: FRAC Rhône-Alpes, 1989), 7–19.

22. John Knight in conversation with the author, New York, April 1994.

23. See Jacques-Alain Miller, "Ce que fait insigne," course given in the Department of Psychoanalysis, Université Paris VIII, 1986–1987.

24. In this regard, see for example the significant exhibition "Damaged Goods: Desire and the Economy of the Object," organized by Brian Wallis, The New Museum, New York, 1986. [*Damaged Goods: Desire and the Economy of the Object*, exhibition catalog, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986).—Ed.]

25. See *John Knight. Treize Travaux*, exhibition catalog (Villeurbanne: Le Nouveau Musée, 1989).

26. See Marx's famous chapter "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof," in *Das Kapital*, Vol. 1, Part 1, Chapter I, Section 4, according to which this fetish character is based on the dissimulation of a real relation, a diversion of attention away from the social conditions in which objects are manufactured toward those objects themselves, endowed with an enigmatic character, and a cortege of spectacular associations with no relationship to their use; also see Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977). Sennett analyzes the strange superimposition of imaginary representations in the object as a manifestation of a dual effect of capitalism: of mystification and privatization. The superimposition of different worlds of representation depends, in his analysis, on the existence of a given method of production, capitalism, yet it also depends on the given belief in the omnipresence of human character traits in the object.

The very movement of alienation, separation, division, and isolation of capitalism gives rise, in industrial societies, to a flight toward a restrictive privacy—this ideology of privacy in turn transforms all political categories into psychological ones. Tracing the social career of narcissism, resentments against everything foreign, the psychologization of politics, personal relationships, signs of civilization such as the celebrity system, and, last, a reversion to forms of regionalism and ethnic identities, all testify to this tendency. In this retreat, Richard Sennett detects emotional dynamics, based on the principle of new, supposedly resistant communities, that are yet determined by notions of effectiveness rather than political conditions. Therefore, class divisions, and the hegemonic relations resulting from them, remain intact.

27. The intrusion is here based on gift subscriptions. See Dan Graham, "On John Knight's Journals Work," *Journal: A Contemporary Art Magazine* 4, no. 40 (Fall 1984): 111. Reprinted in this volume.

28. Buchloh, "Knight's Moves," 7–8.

29. See section IV of this essay.

30. The desire to search for arbitrariness is here formulated like an imperative demand to lend forms a foundation that is independent of the subject.

31. As an immemorial strategy, irony is to be found in a certain tone of John Knight's work. Irony is necessary when it is not enough to reply on a logical level, in moments when it does not suffice to refute claims with rational arguments and when dialectical objections run aground. What is called for then is a ruse, dissimulation, multilayered language, that splitting that makes you look like trespassing onto the field of the other, in order to reveal inconsistency. Irony, as we know, was one of the resources of the Socratic methods to meet the argumentative excellence of the Sophists.

32. In accordance with the original formula "The greatest happiness of all those whose interest is in question," in Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation,* Vol. I, Chapter 1, Note by the Author, July 1822 (London: W. Pickering, 1823), 1–2. Bentham's utilitarianism, characterized by Sidney Webb as the "Protestantism of Sociology" [in *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, ed. G. Bernard Shaw (London: The Fabian Society, 1889), 45.—Ed.], was mocked by Marx: "Jeremy Bentham is a purely English phenomenon. . . . In no time and in no country has the most homespun commonplace ever strutted about in so self-satisfied a way. . . . I should call Mr. Jeremy a genius in the way of bourgeois stupidity." Marx, *Das Kapital,* Vol. 1, Part 7, Chapter XXIV, Section 5, note 50.

33. For this paragraph I am indebted to the remarkable article by Jacques-Alain Miller, "Le despotisme de l'Utile: la machine panoptique de Jeremy Bentham," *Ornicar,* no. 3 (May 1975): 3–36; reprinted in *Barca!,* no. 1 (September 1993): 149–187. [Jacques-Alain Miller, "Jeremy Bentham's Panoptic Device," *October* 41 (Summer 1987): 3–29.—Ed.]

34. Miller, "Jeremy Bentham's Panoptic Device," 7.

35. These terms were coined by Bentham.

36. Miller, "Jeremy Bentham's Panoptic Device," 28.

37. Ibid., 7.

38. John Knight, "Ecoaesthetics," in *AL(L)READY MADE,* exhibition catalog (Hertogenbosch: Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst. Het Kruithuis, 1992), n.p.

39. Marie Jean Sauret, "Actualité de l'utilitarisme," *Barca!,* no. 1 (September 1993): 241. [Not translated into English; my translation.—Ed.]

40. Miller, "Jeremy Bentham's Panoptic Device," 21.

41. See section V of this essay. It is worth noting that recent studies of Jeremy Bentham stress his theory of fictions and emphasize the relation between the utility principle and misery in civilization. The theory of fictions affirms the need for the fictitious dimension in all discourses which aim for an account of reality, while at the same time pursuing the rational endeavor of dismantling illegitimate symbols of superiority. See Christian Laval, *Jeremy Bentham: Le Pouvoir des Fictions* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France—PUF, 1994). Laval concludes, "There is no doubt that utilitarianism constitutes industrial societies, as well as the sciences which claim to guarantee their 'regulation,' along with institutional arrangements which find their reason to be in the supply of goods and services that nurture 'the greatest happiness.' But, it constitutes them not so much as 'factories of sheer happiness', but rather in terms of the misery in the civilization of the individual and of happiness." Laval, *Jeremy Bentham,* 122. [Not translated into English; my translation.—Ed.]

42. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar: Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis,* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 92.

43. Knight, "Ecoaesthetic," n.p.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Pierre Bruno, "Partition Marx, Freud, Lacan," *Barca!,* no. 1 (September 1993): 54–55.

47. Lacan, *The Seminar: Book XVII.* In this seminar, held in 1969–1970, Lacan criticizes Marx's belief that it would be possible to account for surplus value. Marx, who "invented the symptom," grounds capitalism and surplus value in their devastating consequences. Lacan however observes that he underestimated surplus value in terms of surplus *jouissance—plus-de-jouir—,* which cannot be accounted for, because it can only be glimpsed in the dimension of the loss. "In fact, it is only through this effect of entropy, through this wasting that *jouissance* acquires a status and shows itself. This is why I initially introduced it by the term *Mehrlust*, surplus *jouissance*" (p. 50).

48. See Karl Marx, *Das Kapital,* Vol. 1, Part 3, Chapter VII, Section 2.

49. See Karl Marx, *Das Kapital,* Vol. 1, Part 7, Chapter XXIV, Section 3 ("The Abstinence Theory").

50. Surplus *jouissance,* whose representative form in history is surplus value, involves the object as a promise of *jouissance*—an object given the function of a condenser of *jouissance,* the guarantee of more to retrieve. This is where the function of products is involved—products generated by industrial civilization. These are the products that illustrate this surplus *jouissance*. It is these products that the proletarian should hold accountable for the exploitation he is subjected to.

51. Bruno, "Partition Marx, Freud, Lacan," 56. [Not translated into English; my translation.—Ed.]

52. Jacques Lacan, "Du Discours Psychanalytique," Lecture given in Milan, May 12, 1972, in *Lacan en Italie, 1953–1978* (Milan: La Salamandra), 41–55. ["On Psychoanalytic Discourse," trans. Jack W. Stone, http://web.missouri.edu/~stonej/Milan_Discourse2.pdf, 6–15; last accessed March 12, 2013.—Ed.] The capitalist discourse shifts the subject into the position of the master, just like in the discourse of the hysteric. The difference, however, lies in the fact that the subject in the former case is in command over surplus

jouissance—but this command itself must proceed via S2, namely the mediation of a knowledge marked by science. It is a surplus *jouissance* subjected to the knowledge and technology it is derived from. See Colette Soler, course given in the Department of Psychoanalysis, Université Paris VIII, 1989–1990, May 23, 1990.

53. Bruno, "Partition Marx, Freud, Lacan," 40.

54. In "Radiophonie" Lacan would say, "For . . . surplus value . . . is the cause of the desire that an economy makes its principle: that of the extensive production, therefore insatiable, of that lack-in-enjoying (*manque-à-jouir*). It is accumulated on the one hand to increase the means of this production on the side of capital. It extends consumption, on the other hand, without which this production would be vain, precisely from its ineptitude in procuring a *jouissance* that would allow it to slow down." Jacques Lacan, "Radiophonie," trans. Jack W. Stone, http://web.missouri.edu/~stonej/Radiophonie.pdf; last accessed March 12, 2013; the original French passage is to be found in *Scilicet,* no. 2/3 (December, 1970): 87.

55. Increased industrial production as well as the standardization of use will be legitimized right away by the supposed standardization of reception and consumption.

56. Jacques Lacan, "On Psychoanalytic Discourse," 11.

57. Jacques Lacan, "Excursus," in *Lacan en Italie, 1953–1978* (Milan: La Salamandra), 97. [Not translated into English; my translation.—Ed.]

58. Ibid.

59. From Lacan, "On Psychoanalytic Discourse," 10:

> . . . the crisis, not of the master discourse, but of capitalist discourse, which is its substitute, is overt (*ouverte*). I am not at all saying to you that capitalist discourse is rotten, on the contrary, it is something wildly clever, eh? Wildly clever, but headed for a blowout. After all, it is the cleverest discourse that we have made. It is no less headed for a blowout. This is because it is untenable. It is untenable . . . because capitalist discourse is here, you see . . . a little inversion simply between the S_1 and the $\not{S}$ . . . which is the subject . . . it suffices so that that goes on casters (*ça marche comme sur des roulettes*), indeed that cannot go better, but that goes too fast, that consumes itself, that consumes itself so that is consumed (*ça se consomme, ça se consomme si bien que ça se consume*).

60. Jacques Lacan, "La Troisième, Lecture delivered in Rome, 1974," in *Lettres de l'Ecole Freudienne,* no. 16 (November 1975): 187. [Not translated into English; my translation.—Ed.]

61. Soler, course given in the Department of Psychoanalysis, May 23, 1990.

62. Lacan has consistently outlined this danger of a return of segregation and racism. Thus in 1974, in "Television," he observed: "Leaving this Other to his own mode of *jouissance,* that would only be possible by not imposing our own on him, by not thinking of him as underdeveloped. Given, too, the precariousness of our own mode, which from now on takes its bearings from the ideal of an overbecoming [*plus-de-jouir*], which is, in fact, no longer expressed in any other way, how can one hope that the empty forms of humanhysterianism [*humanitairerie*] disguising our extortions can continue to last?" Jacques Lacan, "Television," trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, *October* 40 (Spring 1987): 36–37. Ten years earlier, in the seminar of 1964, he already pointed out, "There is something profoundly masked in the critique of the history that we have experienced. This, re-enacting the most monstrous and supposedly superseded

forms of the holocaust, is the drama of Nazism. I would hold that no meaning given to history, based on Hegeliano-Marxist premises, is capable of accounting for this resurgence—which only goes to show that the offering to obscure gods of an object of sacrifice is something to which few subjects can resist succumbing, as if under some monstrous spell." Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar: Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 274–275.

63. Lacan, *The Seminar,* Book XVII, 31.

64. Bruno, "Partition Marx, Freud, Lacan," 53. [Not translated into English; my translation.—Ed.]

65. John Knight, text on the announcement card for *The Campaign,* 1993.

Who's Afraid of JK? An Interview with John Knight

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Isabelle Graw

ISABELLE GRAW When reading about your work, I noticed that it is often classified under the label "institutional critique." This concept is based on the assumption that art is supposedly capable of "critiquing" either the literal institutional site or cultural confinement in general and can thereby attain an epistemological function. I was wondering what both the notions of "critique" and of "institution" mean in relation to your work. Is it the institution in the narrow sense of an art institution addressed as topographical entity? Or is it rather an enlarged notion of the institution as an abstract continuity of corporate structures that cannot be pinned down to the literal site only?

JOHN KNIGHT Those texts that you refer to are coming from the art institutional site of exchange, where the term "institutional critique" derives as well. My interest, however, is to participate in the larger cultural critical discourse and not some rarefied site of my own construction. That does not mean that my practice resides outside of the art world, but that the subjects I find interesting may.

IG What I like about your work is exactly that it doesn't seem to be fixated on the art apparatus. *Journals Series*, first initiated in 1977, is a work that anticipates how the laws of so-called celebrity culture actually entered the art world in order to take over and reign today. When you literally forced subscriptions of lifestyle magazines onto members of the art world, changed cultural hierarchies were addressed as much as the impossibility of an idealized belief in art became obvious. Your work has diagnostic and prophetic potential in pointing to the dramatic shifts whose consequences we are dealing with today.

BENJAMIN H. D. BUCHLOH Which may have been one of the reasons why the work was sometimes hard to accept.

JK Well, I have never really understood where such idealized belief systems come from. Certainly, the majority of my work is derived from sources other than aesthetic models within art history and seeming to manifest themselves in many different ways, which may be why the work is less acceptable. After all, when you grow up inside the spectacle apparatus of Los Angeles, celebrity culture becomes one's naturalized base of understanding.

IG How would you characterize the difference between your project and Michael Asher's and Daniel Buren's?

JK Well, although we agree about many things, I think there is something fundamentally different between my practice and theirs. Theirs seems to be based on a keenly developed interest in a radical expansion of the problems of sculpture and painting, respectively—in quite extraordinary ways. I have never shared, to the same degree of interest or depth of understanding, a project that is initiated from within an art-historical perspective. For that reason, I've always felt somewhat outside of the sociopolitical shell of that institution—let's say it's a bit of a foreign body to me.

IG But aren't you, as soon as you have had a series of exhibitions as you did, deeply entangled in the microcosmos of the art world? Even if you don't want to invest in it?

JK I don't say that I'm not practicing in that world. I've never had an investment in the internal structural characteristics of any of its historical problems. I'm absolutely working in the art world, but I think there is a difference between that and working on the custodial conditions of art history.

BB The bicycle bell work you did in The Hague in 1992–1993; what kind of work is that? How do you see that now? It positions itself in what kind of discursive intersections?

JK Well, I would say that it is located, or more accurately, operates between the two registers of the micro-institution of art, where the opportunity begins, and the larger discursive site of geopolitics.

BB One could start by describing it as a project that situates itself explicitly in the specificity of a nation-state cultural issue, and another way is that it situates itself in the specificity of ecological questions particularly relevant in that nation-state condition. You wouldn't have done that piece in Germany, for example . . .

JK Absolutely not. In those terms, it clearly had to be in the Netherlands. What else I can say is that it's a very good example of dropping into the art world by invitation in order to produce a work with a subject that refers to a sociopolitic located outside the micropolitical boundaries of the art world.

Boy with bicycle bell, Havana, Cuba, 1994.

IG So you step in, in order to point in another direction.

JK I step in, in order to receive the opportunities to function. For whatever sociopsychological reasons, this subculture seems to be the most compatible for the formulation of a base of operation.

BB If only it still were a subculture . . .

JK What would you call it?

IG A visual industry . . .

BB Monolithic . . .

JK Actually I think it operates like a small-town meeting.

BB Right.

IG It has both characteristics: it is an overlookable marketplace with archaic transactions and has corporate dimensions.

JK I agree. There is something very interesting about the fact that it remains so very archaic and at the same time totally subsumed by the metabusiness of the day with little real understanding, or care, by those at the epicenter, for a notion of political resistance.

BB The bicycle bell. What I really liked about that work is it redefines in a single gesture every model of site specificity that we had possibly thought about until that moment, and it's completely reversing every aspect of site specificity. And nevertheless as it does so it gives a completely new model of the absolute necessity for specific interventions. It's not like going into some fake globalism or some mythical opening-up, but it really redefines the levels of intervention in the different types of site-specific approaches, and these are geopolitical, ecological, and nation-state specific.

JK I would refer to it as a form of discursive specificity, but certainly not the situational model of site specificity that has been proposed by Miwon Kwon and others that tend to legitimate a generation of nineties fashion production, the likes of Pardo, etc., which are essentially designer knick-knacks disguised as "installation art."

IG So in what way is the way you legitimize your practice through a site different from that type of practice you just criticized, like Pardo's?

JK Because I don't think my project is constructed for or received in the same way. It's not reified under the conditions of the already fixated institutional frame like those projects are. I try not to reproduce the actual model of production that I'm attempting to interrogate, as I think others do with impunity.

BB You were the first artist that I've known who for many, many years, without even understanding what you meant at the time, said that all artistic decisions are design decisions. Your interest in design as a language, as one language among many systems within an ideological apparatus, has become very clear by now. Your understanding of design history and of design traditions in their transformation from the 1920s to the 1950s is a very integral part of that. Why would you then not welcome an artist like Pardo who supposedly does exactly that in the most programmatic way? He's the guy who brought this out to the foreground and made a megaproject out of it.

JK Well, I welcome the illustration of the problem I think it represents, but don't cuddle up to projects so politically bankrupted. It is exactly the black hole of consumption that it wants to be and questions precisely nothing.

IG His work is not about posing or causing problems.

JK There are no problems, but I would take this back to the Bauhaus, and the inherent problems in designing for a better world, which carries itself over to Cranbrook and spreads about the globe as it enters into the marketplace, vis-à-vis Design for Better Living, Design Research, Design Within Reach, and of course, the granddaddy of them all, IKEA. Product design, interior design, and installation design are all deeply implicated in capitalist ideology. It's the primary lexicon for substantiating neoliberalism. It's the off-the-shelf language of hegemony.

BB But it has a long, complicated history with gradations; at the same time, for example, you are deeply interested, as far as I know, in Eames. What's your interest in Eames? I never really understood if it was a critical interest or an interest in the Eames effect. I think it was both probably, because the Eames are kind of a design-history turning point where it departs from the emancipatory promises of Bauhaus practices and International Style to the initiation of the massively operated consumer culture via design. We now see the consequences of it in ways that we had never anticipated.

JK The day after they made the splints and bentwood research was the day they took a political dive. Although they did appear to have a partial reprieve at the moment their house was completed, but in the end it all added up to a career of corporate cronyism—IBM utopianism—producing under the guise of multiculturalism, slide installations, and film projects, "It's a small world," etc. These projects represent the epitome of corporate propaganda.

BB When they go to the Soviet Union, most evidently so.

IG I'm interested in coming to terms with different types of site reflexivity or context specificity. There are cases—as in Liam Gillick's work—where the supposedly given context or site simply functions as a legitimization for a work that is ultimately formalist and doesn't address or pose problems. Is a context something that is given for you? Or do you construct it yourself to a certain degree?

JK I think of context as a multidimensional condition. The initial context is provided by invitation, which acts as an index, and operates as the basis for any number of other considerations that are drawn from a larger discursive site.

IG But the choice of the bicycle bells doesn't seem completely evident to me. There is a moment of playfulness, of an arbitrary decision or even of something that you didn't deliberately choose but that came to you.

JK I would say that it seems to come from a process of trial and error, and is located sometime between consideration and its manifest realization, at which time it becomes intentional. Many artists attribute it to a mysterious act that takes place in the studio process . . . this idea truly fascinates me.

BB The credit card project from *Worldebt* is also a good example because it indicates strategies of defining your work that clearly interrelate different geopolitical systems or expanded notions of geopolitical distribution, and construct at an early moment a sense of the inescapability of culture as being suspended within globalized forms of conflict and interest and exchanges, way before the whole talk of globalization became an issue in cultural practices. First of all I'm surprised that no one has really recognized your work for having gone to that issue early on and taken such a position, and second I would like to know how

John Knight, *Worldebt,* 1994, detail.

your position, your own investigation with regard to what has now become a tendency or a trend or a compulsive dimension of all curatorial operations—to position themselves in international biennials or to position themselves as globalist—wasn't recognized within that tendency as having anticipated or uncovered the necessity to see those intersections when it comes to cultural production.

JK The institution that you are referring to is deeply implicated in the dominant ideology of Western hegemony, and therefore blinded by its own power structure. So it should not come as a surprise to see global culture being presented as a commodity. On the other hand, it was immediately recognized by the Cuban participants in the bell project, for example. I was stunned by the clarity of their understanding and support for my engagement in geopolitical exchange.

BB And a follow-up question: why did Okwui Enwezor not include you in the last documenta? Why did he not understand what you were doing?

JK I don't know, but I would suspect that it's because these are not exhibitions designated for a real political discourse; after all, they're constructed from within the art institution and are by nature nothing more than political pastiche. I did go to the effort to make an unsolicited proposal to the documenta committee, to which I received no response. Being in yet another documenta inspired me very little, but the program of this particular exhibition was of great interest to me. As you know, there was this structure of five "platforms" scattered about the globe, in places of real social crisis, with the fifth operating as the actual exhibition in Kassel. Global crisis exacerbated by the World Bank and IMF policies. So I thought the ideal conditions of reception for my *Worldebt* project would be to be streaming back to the art world from the four initial sites, via the World Wide Web, without any representation in Kassel itself. As we knew at the time, those invited to participate in the four other platforms were made up of the Prada set with absolutely no local representation at all. All in all, it seemed to be an ideal opportunity to drag a larger discursive condition into an intersection with the institution of art.

IG While you were describing the work, I was thinking of a particular explanation for its not being taken into consideration. Curators tend to have a list of names, the usual suspects, in their minds—a list that is being reproduced, and is also very fixed. The reason that your work doesn't figure on it could be that it doesn't fit into a general desire for thematically reductivist, so-called political works, works that are supposedly "dealing with" a certain subject matter.

JK I would agree with you and say that in addition to not participating in the institutional food chain—which equates to dropping off the institutional radar—my project not only disagrees with the recent curator-as-meta-artist trend, it challenges the very nature of such an action by insistently indicting the organizing body, each and every time, within the critical status of the work.

BB Globalism in the art world is kind of a missionary venture. It disguises the search for new markets and the search for new resources as this project of disseminating liberal, advanced forms of cultural representation. But in fact it doesn't analyze the real ideology of global interests within the cultural sphere at all as being primarily centered within the very power and economic centers of our own empire, and that's what

your work does and therefore it disqualifies itself completely from being absorbed in the globalist ideology of contemporary cultural institutions. That would be my answer to my own question.

JK I would agree with you, and the exhibition histories are there to prove it, from the Centre Pompidou exhibition a number of years ago, *Magiciens de la terre,* to the documenta 11, *The Museum as Muse,* and historically *Primitivism in Twentieth-Century Art* at MoMA.

IG I was just thinking back to what we said before about the odd coexistence between an archaic structure of transactions on the one hand and corporate structure defining what used to be called the art world. I think that this condition is materialized in your work for American Fine Arts. Your work anticipates the situation we are facing today, where there is a seamless continuity among the art gallery, the boutique, and the lobbies of corporations. If you go to Gagosian or Matthew Marks, they are decorated with these same types of bouquets.

JK And restaurants.

IG And restaurants, as you pointed out in your exhibition. So this continuity, which has become even more pronounced since then, is really addressed in that work. On the other hand, there is the archaic networking in the restaurant, the importance and value of personal [connections] that are also metaphorically addressed in that show. For me, it's a work that already in 1998 anticipated a condition that we only start to fully understand now.

JK I must say I've always been a bit disappointed that it was not realized when I first proposed it to an uptown gallerist in 1988, which at the time elicited the infamous moment of silence.

IG Too early; she didn't get it.

JK In any event, Colin de Land had known about the proposal from that time and always had it in his mind to do it someday. I must say that the way in which the work was ultimately realized was an extraordinary experience, to say the least. There we were, on the street like two missionaries, going from restaurant to restaurant proselytizing in seersucker and sunglasses. What a wonderful way to produce. There is a fabulous picture of the two of us posed in front of a potential client.

John Knight and Colin de Land, New York, 1998.

IG Were you interested in the increasing structural analogies between what used to be called the art world, the fashion industry, and corporate logics—spheres that are now very deeply overlapping—and was this something you saw coming?

JK Well, these are some of the larger cultural considerations that I've been referring to when I speak about work within the greater discursive site of influence. This is how, I think, something like *Journals Series* could be considered a viable site of production—victimizing myself, so to speak, in order to understand the consumer condition.

IG Didn't you also victimize others by forcing a subscription onto them?

JK Actually, I gave them a work of art that by its critical nature reconfigured the receiver's position in relationship to the conventions of the consumption and exchange process, which makes them a partner in the indictment of the work's intention.

BB I have one question that has to have been with me for a long time, as you know, which is [about] your principle of only producing a work when receiving a commission.

JK The origins of that are rather mysterious to me—why I would insist to the point of self-detriment.

BB It's also a strange concept of creativity. It's an amalgam, that's what's interesting about it. No artist in our history would have let his or her creativity be defined in terms of an external request. It's the countercreativity model; it totally defines the act of intervention as being externally determined as a dialogic interaction, but not as a monologic appropriation.

JK In modernity, yes, but once the site of immaculate conception is put to question . . .

BB When is that?

JK At the moment the studio is no longer the primary site of production. But I don't speak about it in the same way as I would refer to the Buren effect, which, as I understand it, was to see the need to question the studio function in order to open up the possibilities for a radical expansion of an art-historical problem. Mine was based, at least initially, on a keen interest in models of production—architecture, etc.—that are primarily grounded, once again, in larger sociopolitical discourses. Of course, in order to maintain one's sanity, there exists a closet practice, musing endlessly with propositions with the hopes that somebody finds out.

IG Everybody has something in the drawer.

BB Is that what you do?

JK Yes. But I must say again that I never understood that idea of something happening again and again in the same specific place. It just makes no sense to me.

BB What are you referring to as something happening again and again in the same place?

JK Studio production. The continuous generation of work out of the same monolithic site.

IG How about the commodity status of your work? On the one hand I feel that your work is consistently emphasizing a nonidealist understanding of art as commodity—for instance in the flower bouquet project. On the other hand it seems to emphasize that art is a commodity, but a commodity of a special kind, especially as your works don't circulate as much as others do as pure exchange value on the market. So the commodity status is addressed—your work has no illusions about it—but then again you produce works that don't circulate on the market. It's a paradox.

JK Is it a paradox? I would call it a moment of resistance in the commodity exchange, when the receiver is given the task to figure out how, if at all, to commodify a product, which might define the terms of its own unique commodity status. Not to say that this is something that has been clearly thought through, but it is a position that I desire for my work . . . Something that has every means available to it and every reason to be consumed yet remains aloof suggests that the possibility for an interrogation exists. As Adorno would say, the moment of negation.

IG And how exactly does it happen in a work like the JK relief?

BB Or the mirrors?

JK I don't know if it does happen.

BB It doesn't because they're objects.

JK But they're all objects.

BB I would say that the mirrors and the *JK* logotypes are traditional objects; you can put them in an auction, you can sell them as a painting or a relief or a sculpture.

JK You could put the bells or the credit cards for the *Worldebt* project in auction as well.

IG They're less suitable to this market sensibility because they correspond less to the longing for a signature style.

JK I've had numerous mirrors returned.

BB Numerous mirrors returned because of what?

JK Maybe they are overdesigned.

BB Oh, really, people didn't like them anymore? What can they trade them for?

JK Presumably other art.

IG In what way is this related to your notion of career? Faced with a situation where young artists have very positivistic and unbroken models of career, your model seems to be the noncareer as career.

BB This relates very well to the previous question: how can one define one's practice as externally determined by commission, only so to speak for lack of more . . . ?

JK This notion of career, or should we say careerism, is certainly the bankrupted idea that allows for a seamless trajectory through a set of predetermined goals that provide the producer with the skills necessary to navigate the neoliberal global marketplace.

BB And so your model, and I think in this case it's comparable to Michael Asher's approach as well, is a theoretical model that defines the artist as nonproducer. But it's not just a case of refusal or negation only; it's much more complicated than this, and you were just about to elaborate on it in a very interesting way, that it's not a withholding position, it's not a position of pure negation, it's a position that intricately engages with the condition of cultural production and with the concept of the response that you provide to those conditions, namely, corporate cultural demands for pure utility. In a sense you make a contract every single time you make a work, anticipating that the work will be used anyway. The work has no freedom, the work has no autonomy, the work is inscribed from the very beginning in a transaction of exchange, deployment, representational functions. In those terms it is possible to see why you engage in a contract only rather than a model of creativity and independence and autonomy.

JK I think it represents an inversion of what takes place in the marketplace conundrum, wherein a contract is presumed onto the receiver through strategies of seduction. In turn, the consumer assumes he or she is in control as a commissioner of that pair of shoes or sculptural knickknack, when in fact it is precisely the contrary. Understanding that is to understand the need for a position of resistance, which I think resides in the inversion of the order of need, which can allow an artist the opportunity to touch upon subjects of consumption and exchange, and the design strategies that sustain their presumed purpose within the culture industry, without reverting to the role of a cultural custodian.

Meaning at the Margins: The Semiological Inversions of John Knight

Alexander Alberro

Our lifestyle is not up for negotiation.

—President George H. W. Bush, 1990[1]

Since the late 1960s, John Knight has produced a thoroughgoing, institutionally critical art. In his untitled installation at American Fine Arts in October 1998, he continued this caustic, interrogative practice with a project that was as intellectually rigorous as it was seductive. Entering the gallery from the barren concrete pavement of Wooster Street in New York City's SoHo district, one was immediately engulfed by the visual and olfactory extravaganza of more than twenty-five floral arrangements that seemed momentarily to transform the exhibition space into a flower shop . . . or a funeral parlor.[2] For where else would one find a collection of so many disparate floral displays with an entirely random composition without any unifying style, theme, color, or motif—their only commonality being their use of some types of plant? In one corner there was the chopped-off top half of a magnolia tree, in another a large potted cactus; bouquets of all sizes—from the understated and discrete single stem in a vase to the full over-the-top profusion of flowers—filled up the space. All of the bouquets were accompanied by small cards acknowledging the name of the lending institution, always a restaurant identified with the ever-expanding art world of Manhattan. Now and then, the name of the floral designer was also printed on the card. In addition, a text on the wall at the entrance of the gallery, signed with the artist's monogram in the style of a

John Knight, Project for American Fine Arts, Co., 1998, detail.

John Knight, Project for American Fine Arts, Co., 1998, installation view.

corporate logo, *JK,* indicated that Knight had also installed museological plaques in each participating restaurant, announcing the temporary loan of the floral display to the gallery's exhibition.

This project is probably Knight's most "beautiful" piece to date. However, one should not let oneself be lulled by the visual and olfactory splendor into concluding that the installation simply presents a collection of floral arrangements. For Knight's piece is polyvalent, its multiple interpretations unfolding like petals. Despite the overwhelming sensual and seemingly neutral nature of the show, Knight has in no way compromised his ideals and the steadfastly defiant aesthetics of resistance that typified his earlier work. Indeed, in this project Knight performs a number of semiological inversions that have come to characterize his artistic strategy over the past three decades—a strategy that is consistent in its refusal of reification and its pursuit of the increasingly vanishing realm of criticality.

Deconstructing Presence

Inevitably, when addressing the diversified oeuvre of Knight, one is drawn to the authorial presence of the artist as it is self-consciously inserted into the work. This entry point is encouraged by Knight's practice of deploying his signature in the spectacular form of a logotype, a practice in which the artist's monogram is stylized into a symbol like those that are commonly used by corporations for brand-marketing purposes. During a decades-long refusal to attain a consistent and identifiable morphology, *JK* at once stands as a nexus bringing together a diverse array of projects and providing a stable chart for translations into meaning. This efficiency is obtained at the price of a radical simplification, an impoverishment, and an almost irrevocable regression in the motion of "value." Here it is worth recalling that the overdetermining power of the artist's signature has traditionally served art historians, critics, dealers, museums, and collectors as a means by which to fix identity, determine meaning and interpretation, integrate a work into a series (that of the works of a particular author), and ultimately help to allocate value. Thus the artwork attains its status in the culture by means of the signature; it is not simply read but perceived in its differential value. "Until the nineteenth century," writes Jean Baudrillard in "Gesture and Signature" (1972), "the copy of an original work had its own value; copying was a legitimate practice. In our time the copy is illegitimate, inauthentic: it is no longer 'art.'"[3] Indeed there are few things more problematic in the history of modern art than the concept of the "copy," or even worse, that of the "in the school of," where the individual artist may still have been involved to a certain degree in actual production. In Western culture, the cult of the artist as bourgeois individual has been the dominant trope in the visual arts, architecture, literature, and academia alike since at least the late eighteenth century. Value increases in this context in the degree that an artwork can be identified positively as the product of a single individual.[4]

The inherent inadequacy of a methodology that attempts to affix the meaning and value of an artwork solely in terms of the individual identity of an artist is quite apparent in Knight's oeuvre. He directly calls into question and parodies the fetishistic cult of the solitary figure of the individual artist or godlike creator. By highlighting the function of the signature to identify a subject at the heart of an object, Knight underscores

how subject and object become fused in the operation of commodification. As Benjamin Buchloh observes in a 1986 essay, aptly entitled "Knight's Moves," "the art object traditionally registers projections of identity (individual, cultural, national, those of social class or ethnic affiliation). Paradoxically, the experience of identity is mediated by an act of reification, an act in which parts of the self are invested in the object which receives the projected image of that identity like a mirror."[5] The signature is an indelible part of this process, for insofar as it at once serves to indicate the presence of the artist as the source of the production of the work, and establishes normative constraints and a stable order of meaning, it is also used to legally seal and validate ownership, be it of a concrete piece of (art) property or an abstract idea. And it is this relation to ownership and authority that is an obvious concern to Knight. For he manipulates not only his own signature but signature in its more general abstract meaning as sign and logotype.

During the past two decades, Knight has systematically deconstructed the personal signature and its relatives: the historical seal, the coat of arms, the brand name, the national flag, the national language, and the corporate logo. For the 1992–1993 project *De Campagne* (*The Campaign*) for Stroom, The Hague's Center for Visual Arts, Knight produced bicycle bells that emitted the croaking of frogs. He then asked residents of The Hague, the Netherland's national capital, to trade their standard bicycle bells for the *kikkerbels* (frog bells) and afterward sent their bells to Havana where they were sorely needed.[6] By providing Cuba with bicycle bells, a seemingly innocent act of supplying a country with goods that it lacks, Knight's contribution to *De Campagne* at once mobilized public opinion and violated international trade agreements. Each person who participated in the exchange not only could claim to possess an artwork, but became directly involved in global politics. However, a closer examination of the design of the *kikkerbel* and the choice of the frog's "croak" to replace the traditional ring indicates more complex metaphors at work.

In his creation of a bicycle bell to be used as an instrument of exchange meant to break through the powerful US embargo on Cuba, Knight also deconstructs, both visually and acoustically, the old city seal, or signature, of The Hague. On the crown of the *kikkerbel* was engraved an image of the stork—one of Holland's most cherished national emblems and the official seal of The Hague. But in Holland the stork teeters on the verge of extinction because of the near disappearance of a critical link in

its food chain, the frog. On the one hand, then, the *kikkerbels,* fabricated from recycled soda bottle molds, decorated with the sign of a stork, and emitting the sound of a frog, metaphorically comment on Holland's headlong rush for economic development and on the great costs of this phenomenon to the ecosystem. The recycling of the exchanged bells in Havana, on the other hand, redirects the issue away from the two obvious antagonists, the United States and Cuba, and toward a third player: the Netherlands. In a world of multinational corporations and increasing globalization, it is too easy to make a simple schema with only two protagonists—instead, all nations become implicated.

Indeed, a preoccupation with extinction (and its inanimate corollary, dissolution) is central to Knight's work and is something to which he repeatedly returns. In particular, Knight links extinction to the subject's or object's afterlife in the form of widely disseminated signs. For after something has ceased to exist, it is often only the sign that remains. Of course, this is part of the standard definition of a sign: something that stands for what it is not. The sign, however, though engaged in perpetual semiosis, continuously producing other signs, also includes the object. Hence the sign is never entirely split from its referent: that is, the sign is never completely separated from the conditions in which it was constructed, for those very conditions brought it into being.[7] In short, the sign symbolically retains the power of the originary signified, although it is now only a trace of something that has vanished. And it is no coincidence that in *De Campagne* we are reminded, through the use of the official city seal, of all that in the past had been eradicated under this power as well as of the Netherlands' early role as a major force in European finance: banking and insurance. Also evoked, of course, is a past colonial history that croaks up every now and then.

Further explorations along this line include Knight's 1989 *Federal Style,* which consists of approximately forty copper-plated units, each in the shape of a geographical area of a different Indian reservation, encircling the entire space of the gallery, and the words *FEDERAL STYLE* emblazoned in large letters on the exhibition wall. Through the double referencing of the governmental practices and the architectural style of the European colonial settlers, both in turn overlapped onto the geographical map of the reservations, Knight points to the near annihilation of the Native American population in North America. As Anne Rorimer has astutely remarked, *Federal Style* is located within the greater eco-

John Knight, *Federal Style*, installation view, Richard Kuhlenschmidt Gallery, Los Angeles, 1989.

nomic system by alluding to the way in which possession for some results from the dispossession of others:

> As representations of vast land masses, shrunk to the scale of hand-graspable adornments, they critically harbor political intent, and their metallic surface coating makes direct reference to lucrative mining ventures in the international, corporate quest for commercially viable raw materials. In their delineation of those geographical areas that have been allotted to displaced, indigenous peoples in addition to their identification with semi-precious, jewel-like commodities, the copper forms poignantly point to the elision of large-scale enterprise with the production of consumer objects and to the exploitation and omission of the individual incurred in the process.[8]

Knight's *Home, Home on the Range* of 1991 also summons up reflections of a colonial past. The work consists of a series of eleven 3 × 4–foot doormats, each with a computerized icon, installed flush into the concrete floor in a straight line from the gallery's entrance to its rear

wall. The first image in the series is clearly discernible as that of a traditional tepee such as those associated with the culture of the First Nations of what has come to be known as North America. As the series continues, however, the tepee icon gradually morphs into that of a homestead farm. Thus the work presents a narrativization not only of the progressive domestication of nature but also of the relentless obliteration of all previously existing cultures by the manifest destiny of the European settlers. According to Knight, this "computerized narrative present(s) a symbolic metamorphosis from one cultural derivation (nomads), to another (settlers). I would say that the shift from image to a signalectic sign induces the symbolic loss of life."[9]

Consistently in tension in Knight's work as a whole, and fundamental to his long-standing strategy of inversion, is a complex interaction between presence and absence. As Birgit Pelzer notes, "Playing with the lures and decoys of conventions and shared assumptions, the work of John Knight addresses the veiled, but coercive violence of an order characterized by symbolic constraint, by making certain invisible conjunctions tangible."[10] Additionally, as noted previously, a deconstructive or hermeneutic approach is also at work, one that employs emblems such as city seals as segues into an endless chain of deferred meaning and signification. For as we saw with *De Campagne,* the seal operates not only visually but also acoustically, because Knight's *kikkerbels* functioned as cries of warning and procurers of memory as they croaked through the streets of late twentieth-century Europe.

The modern version of the traditional seal is the corporate logotype, which also confers legitimacy, validation, and authenticity, and acts in a similar fashion as a legal copyrighted signature. Concerning an earlier work from 1983, *Museotypes,* for which Knight presented a series of sixty bone china commemorative plates, each featuring, in the form of an emblematic trademark or corporate logotype, the individual ground plan of one of sixty museums located around the world, Rorimer observes that "it is the de/sign capacity of the corporate logotype that binds the formal and ideological concerns of [the work] together and allies them with the socioeconomic underpinning of their support."[11] For Knight seems to be keenly aware that just as the corporate logo may be based on a lie, so too the signature is equally false.[12] This would then mean that Knight's strategic deployment of *JK* is not dependent on a tautological concept of signification, iconically standing for the identity of the artist.

John Knight, *Home, Home on the Range,* 1991, installation view, Galerie Roger Pailhas, Marseille, France.

Rather, the sign is employed to point emphatically to something else. The particular nature of that something else is the question at hand.

The Screen of Resistance

The process of communication, which necessarily takes place through systems of signification, shapes not only cultural attitudes on which the social order depends but also human subjectivity. As Louis Althusser postulated in the wake of the failures of 1968, these systems of signification function as ideological state apparatuses that center the subject. And yet if, as Althusser writes, "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence," then it supposes a subject capable of mediating a realm between what Jacques Lacan terms the *symbolic* (the social conventions that interpellate the subject as a social being) and the *real* (the material conditions of existence, which the symbolic is inherently unable to fully encompass).[13]

Here it is useful to turn for a moment to the critique of Lacan's concept of the "gaze" by recent scholarship. Kaja Silverman in particular has productively addressed this issue by relating Lacan's theory of the gaze, which she considers to be analogous to the symbolic, to his account of the formation of the subject. According to Lacan's often-cited thesis, the subject's self-awareness as a social being is initially arrived at through the contradictory dynamic of simultaneous identification and alienation.[14] Silverman develops this theory of subject formation by coupling it with another of Lacan's speculative proposals, namely, that of the subject's ability to "isolate the function of the screen and . . . play with the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze." In other words, although the subject is itself a representation of the gaze or of the symbolic order, Silverman argues, the screen (as "the locus of mediation") empowers the subject with the ability to present a representation of its own before the gaze, and thus with an agency (even if only a limited one).[15]

The concept of the screen can also productively be employed to understand Knight's use of his signature and monogram as more than a theatricalization of tautological self-reference. For if the screen can be regarded as the means by which the subject struggles with the disaffecting power of the symbolic, as the way the subject subverts the symbolic's control of the real by offering it that which it cannot incorporate, Knight's manipulation of his signature (or monogram) can be understood

as a strategic screen of resistance that seeks to invert the values that characterize the culture of advanced capitalism by putting forward an understanding of the real that is not to be mediated by the symbolic.[16]

Indeed, as early as the 1982 series of *JK* reliefs that he contributed to the documenta 7 exhibition, Knight experiments with his own signature, making it the subject of his investigation. By having his monogram (shaped in large wooden letters upon which were pasted commercial travel posters) serve as an actual work of art, Knight suggests that what matters most for the institution of art in its present configuration is not the meanings of artworks but whether or not they are "authentic." He thus whispers the lie of the documenta exhibition and its organizers, who, under the pretense of an interest in art and aesthetics, are ultimately mostly concerned with the name value—the *signatures*—of the participating artists. Knight thus tactfully seeks to invert the myth and point to the reality that it is not aesthetics but capital and its advanced capitalist corollary, sign value, that now regulate artistic production, exhibition, and by extension, distribution.

Like a signature, city seal, or corporate logo, a national flag also stands as a sign that creates a false identity. And it should come as no surprise that this is the topic of Knight's *Treize à la Douzaine,* which he proposed to be installed above the entrance of the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, in 1991. For *Treize à la Douzaine*, Knight made a 3 × 5–meter replica of the European Community flag. However, each of the twelve gold stars that at the time represented the European nations in the community was transformed into a star-shaped fragment of one of the "home" flags of the twelve largest populations of guest workers in the community. By giving visibility to the nonrepresented peoples in the European Community, Knight exposes the flag's function as a sign of homogeneity that elides the real, and increasingly splintered, community it ostensibly represents. The flag, like the signature and corporate logo, is thereby posited as a lie that blinds us, that conceals something by showing something else. We see without really seeing, or to put it in the words of Althusser when discussing the operation of classical political economy,

> what [it] does not see, is not what it does not see, it is *what it sees;* it is not what it lacks, on the contrary, it is *what it does not lack;* it is not what it misses, on the contrary, it is *what it does not miss*. This oversight, then, is not to see what one sees, the oversight no longer concerns the object, but *the sight* itself.[17]

Knight's *Bienvenido*, produced in 1990 for the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, consists of an array of elements including a 28 × 240–foot supergraphic, a postcard invitation featuring an image of a Mayan ruin, an intermittent guided tour, and some identifying placards.[18] The frieze, applied to the inside surface of the museum's windows, presents a fragmented composition of the Spanish word for *welcome* (*bienvenido*) in block letters. But only fragments of the individual letters appear on the building's ocean-view fenestration. Hence, for viewers looking out from the inside of the building, access to the spectacular oceanscape is momentarily suspended, and the potential for a critical moment opens up. For viewers looking at the building from the outside, it is at once a greeting that can barely be deciphered, and a welcome that is hollow. In order to fully appreciate the specificity and inherent doubleness of *Bienvenido,* it is important to consider not only that the museum is located very close to the Mexican-US border, but also that at the time of this exhibition the welcome *BIENVENIDO* operated as a frieze spanning the entire ten-lane international border. Accordingly the museum visitor in the space of the gallery is, structurally and allegorically, put into a position similar to that of a newly arrived Mexican immigrant. For although they both see the welcome, neither sees the full picture, which for the museum visitor is considerably greater than the objects he or she comes upon in the gallery (e.g., the day-to-day operations of the institution) and which for the immigrant is much more than the friendly greeting he or she initially encounters when crossing the border (e.g., the racial, economic, and class hostility that in fact underlies the duplicitous welcome). Note also that *bienvenido* is a linguistic phrase and that it is thus not only the visual that this work deconstructs, but the aural as well. Recall that it is the croak of the frog bell that issues its double warning in *De Campagne.* Thus Knight puts in motion the power of discourse and the subtleties of the doubleness of language, for like *Bienvenido*, *bienvenido* means the exact opposite to many people.

Also in 1990, Knight made *There's No Place Like Home*, which, except for a neon sign that represented a generic image of a cow, and a thirty-foot graphic of the words *There's No Place Like Home* wrapped around two elevations of the gallery interior, consisted entirely of a CD audio piece that explored the multiple resonance of place names. The recording constituted a sampling selected from place names in North

John Knight, *Bienvenido,* 1990, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, La Jolla, detail.

America with Native American etymology. By problematizing the ostensible stability and rootedness of "home," *There's No Place Like Home* demonstrates the hollowness of that patriotic phrase, popularized in 1939 during World War II by Judy Garland as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz.* At the same time, like Knight's *Home, Home on the Range* of the following year, *There's No Place Like Home* evokes the legacy of manifest destiny and the mission of European settlers and colonialists to exterminate native populations in order to establish radically different concepts of "home" for those few remaining.

Knight's *Huchal,* presented for La Crieé, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Rennes, in 1991, functions in a similar way. This large, 4 × 5–meter video installation features a child conjugating the French verb *crier* (*to shout*) translated in the Breton dialect as *huchal.* The choice of the verb *to shout* is no coincidence because the building in which the work was first exhibited, La Crieé, took its name from its original function as a fish market typically characterized by mongers loudly hawking their goods. But more significantly, Knight's video projection stands as a protest against the French-language-only policy that devalues "minor" languages and cultures that seek recognition in France today. Seen from

John Knight, *There's No Place Like Home,* 1990, installation view, Galerie Roger Pailhas, Paris, France.

this perspective, *Huchal* stresses the linguistic aspect of colonialism and imperialism within a country. France, it is worth recalling, was the first in the nineteenth century to execute a systematic plan to form a standardized national language of unity. In a way that once again evokes the function of a signature, logotype, and the like, with *Huchal* Knight points to the function of a national language to extinguish all difference in its stead, creating one homogenized and corporatized national culture. By inverting the dominant dialect, *Huchal* serves as a reminder not only of the possibility but also of the necessity of resistance against such fascistic practices.[19]

To sum up thus far, the strategy of inversion—of trying to get a glimpse of the repressed image, sound, or connotation contained within the one presented to the public—is central to Knight's working method. And it is this guiding principle that makes Knight's work so different from that of artists, who consciously, and at times didactically, inject

their work with social content. Instead, Knight argues that politics are immanent in the work and that his role is merely to "redirect" vision or interpretation in a way that ultimately, though subtly, brings the issues at hand to the fore.[20] Through this redirection, Knight deconstructs the lie. Knight's work represents a significant break from the tradition of political art for which Brechtian strategies of estrangement are central. Instead of alienation, Knight's work presents what is most familiar and naturalized. Conspicuously absent from his practice as well are pedagogical strategies of any type. The end result is ultimately a much more subtle work, where the deconstruction of the prevailing ideology and the construction of a new image or view, what Charles Sanders Peirce would refer to as a new "interpretant," is left entirely up to the viewer.[21] Furthermore, rather than make assertive claims about the "real," it focuses on the social institutions that are responsible for the real's production. Instead of affording the viewer a vision of the institution of art that is informed by a predetermined political agenda, it criticizes the political values on which the institution is based. In short, Knight refuses to fix meaning, leaving it wide open in an often frustrating and, in turn (at least for those willing to engage with his work), potentially illuminating gesture.[22]

An Open Form of Dialectical Montage

Knight returned to the intricacies of the personal identity of the artist and the role of the signature in his installation at American Fine Arts. This project called for specific restaurants to loan their floral mascots to the gallery for the duration of his show. In their stead, a museological plaque was temporarily installed on the site left vacant by the mascot in the restaurant, announcing that the floral arrangement was away on a "temporary loan," thereby parodying the practice of lending works of art in the museum world.[23] This strategy of mounting an exhibition with double or parallel components, so that if carried out properly two sites would operate simultaneously, referencing each other across town as it were, is not new for Knight. For instance, with his two-part installation for the alternative gallery Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (LAICA) in 1984, Knight already experimented with the notion of displacement. In LAICA's reception area, he deliberately blocked the entrance to the exhibition space with a large mural (directly appropriated from the Wells Fargo advertising campaign posters) evoking the

mythical expanse of the Western frontier with the ridiculous slogan "LAICA: When the Conversation Turns to Art."[24] This motto was also printed on all LAICA letterheads sent out for the duration of the exhibition. Several wall reliefs, again in the shape of the artist's initials but this time covered with a publicity image for the Wells Fargo Bank, were displayed as well, combining with the other features to create the ambience of a corporate waiting room. The second part of the exhibition featured another wall relief of Knight's monograph in logotype installed within the interior of the Santa Monica branch office of Wells Fargo Bank allocated especially for "art exhibitions." The role each institution usually plays was recontextualized and reversed—the alternative art gallery was turned into a corporate office and the corporate space into a gallery space—and the inherent viability of LAICA to funding organizations and corporate businesses like Wells Fargo was highlighted. As Kim Gordon perceptively notes in the catalog to Knight's LAICA exhibition, the ideological the message is clear:

> For the corporation, [the Western pioneer imagery] functions by presenting a cohesiveness, as in the . . . Wells Fargo stagecoach bringing information and paychecks from the East to the West and stopping at isolated outposts of civilization along the way. It presents the corporation as a primary force in making possible what now exists. Superimposed on this scenario of the past is the photo advertising technology of the present. This strategy of the image appears on corporate billboards throughout the city and extends the locus of the corporation, becoming a part of the exterior architecture of the city. Through their repetition they create the sense of momentum and the illusion of a series of events: heroic service. For LAICA the isolated display of the mural represents a fragment of its concerns: corporate visibility and the evolution of progress of the alternative space toward a state of higher visibility within the community and on an international level.[25]

What is extraordinary about the LAICA/Wells Fargo display in the context of the present investigation of the tactful operation of Knight's interrogative practice is that it provides an early glimpse of another mode of semiological inversion that is consistent throughout Knight's work but is once again potently operative in the American Fine Arts

exhibition—namely, dialectical montage. But unlike Sergei Eisenstein's (one of the originators of this semiological strategy) cinematic practice of dialectical montage, which tried to simplify each element into an unequivocal statement that could then be combined with other shots to achieve a precise effect on the viewer, Knight not only pushes montage into the realm of the spatial and performs a montage of sites but also presents each of the elements with multiple, often autonomous levels of meaning and varied connotations. Moreover, the minimal unit of this kind of montage is not the individual element, as for Eisenstein, but its negation—namely, the empty space between elements. Consequently, the effect intended by the montage is not a dialectically determined "third meaning" (as Roland Barthes would fittingly describe it), an abstraction resulting from the juxtaposition of separate representations, but rather indeterminacy of traditionally fixed associations.[26] Eisenstein makes whatever overtones or connotations are present in each element reinforce the overall effect he is after; in contrast, the polysemy Knight endows his elements with hinders any attempt to arrive at a single meaning. Instead, a range of possible implications extends over the weave of elements, but the point remains elusive. Meanings proliferate and radiate out toward other sequences, producing as much perplexity as illumination. Each element suggests a variety of other associations as well as ruptures, opening onto many alternative pathways that could be followed. The subsequent meaning construct is almost never necessary; it is simply one of many alternatives.

The choice of restaurants for the American Fine Arts project was determined in part by their identity as "art bars" or "watering holes" for the art world.[27] Originally conceived in 1988 to include establishments just in SoHo, the project was broadened for the American Fine Arts exhibition, reflecting the expansion of the gallery circuit to accommodate some restaurants from Chelsea, 57th Street, and the Lower East Side. If for his project at LAICA Knight linked corporate money to art, here he draws a more social connection. What is now targeted is all the networking, self-promotion, making-the-scene type of behavior that is necessary for an artist to be successful in the contemporary art world.

Knight, in a collaborative gesture, left both the final selection of particular restaurants and their solicitation up to American Fine Arts, thereby at once wittingly engaging the gallery and pointing to its complicity in this game of connections and publicity. The involvement of

the gallery in producing the show is part of Knight's overall working methodology, which we have seen rallies as many players in the art world as possible. His art is not just meant to be produced, displayed, and consumed passively, but to be actively co-constructed at all stages. For example, if viewers genuinely sought to comprehend fully the American Fine Arts exhibit, it would be necessary for them to visit each of the restaurants participating and see if each in fact did replace its floral arrangement with a plaque. This encouragement of the viewer to actively partake in the exhibition recalls not only the LAICA project but also the *Bienvenido* installation, which, as one critic noted, imposed on the museum staff to yield time in their schedules to take curious viewers "on a guided tour of the administrative offices, the conference rooms, the storage areas, and other locales normally off-limits to non-museum personnel in order to see the windowpanes that have been modified for the exhibition."[28] By pointing to the inner workings of the museum or gallery, Knight prompts the viewer to contemplate all the "behind-the-scenes" activities involved in an exhibit. Similarly, in the American Fine Arts installation, Knight not only elicits cooperation from the gallery to secure the floral arrangements from the restaurants and to ensure that the flowers receive proper attention (a labor-intensive act that includes climate control, replenishment of water, and removal of dead leaves) but he also points to all the painstaking wheeling and dealing that takes place before and during the gallery exhibition. The analysis of an artwork, or even an exhibition, he suggests, cannot be divorced from a consideration of the other dimensions of the institution of which it forms a part.[29] According to this view, art is shaped and colored by the social location of its exhibition so that the artistic sign or object draws its meaning from the full complexity of its social function, rather than from the qualities that define its place within the system of internal differences. Knight diverges from the traditional (e.g., Saussure's) binary of signifier and signified and allows a much broader array of cultural and social factors to permeate the concept of the sign. From this perspective, the sign is not only open to its object, but also to the "semiotic activity" operative in the context in which it circulates.[30] In sum, Knight's concept of signs—and, in turn, the operation of his art projects—leads him to the production of a body of work that is fully determined by contextual circumstances and that, as such, plainly exposes for contemplation the social and economic forces that enable its formulation.

The Ideological Function of Design

The function and transformation of the signature or the corporate logotype is not absent in Knight's American Fine Arts exhibition for these bouquets have been chosen by the restaurants as their personal signature and fulfill a similar role as an emblem, seal, or logo. Each arrangement is carefully thought out and stylized and somehow made to seem an expression of individual identity. For example, the Wild Lily Tea Room is represented by a solitary wild lily in a small vase, the Monkey Bar by an abundance of colorful, "exotic," and tropical blooms, Provence by a delicate pastel configuration, Bond Street Restaurant by several stark, though imposing, low-maintenance tree branches connoting the no-nonsense business atmosphere of the stock exchange, and Palacinka with light red and purple summer field flowers that one would find in eastern Europe. The installation thus points to floral displays in restaurants as architectural or structural signifiers of what Knight calls *identity capital.*

This is not the first time that Knight has investigated and deconstructed signifiers of class and taste as metaphors for what goes on in the art world. We need only recall his *Journals Series*, begun in 1977 and continuing to the present day, which consists of the unsolicited mailing of gift subscriptions of popular journals and magazines to the homes of, by now, more than a hundred people. The magazines are carefully selected according to Knight's understanding of the interests and personality of the receiver and the architectural design environment in which the latter resides. Most of the magazines and journals are of the lifestyle variety, and deal with issues of fashion, interior design, architecture, food, travel, gardening, and popular hobbies. As Dan Graham notes in an early comment on Knight's *Journals Series,* by penetrating the private spheres of people and homes known by the artist with carefully selected magazines, Knight subtly but deliberately attempts to "influence these recipients' lifestyles or domestic habits/tastes."[31] Furthermore, received as an artwork from the artist, the journals "can take up space in the architecture otherwise impossible for the conventional artwork to occupy—the bathroom, the garage, for instance. It uses those interior design aspects of the architecture that already have in their interior design a coffee table, magazine rack or bedside table."[32] In a further sense, too, because many of the magazines sent by Knight are already

discursive systems creating dialogues on "aesthetic experience," they exceed the concept of the ready-made. "*Journals Series* differs from the traditional ready-made," Buchloh writes in "Knight's Moves," "by being, from the outset, already 'discursive' rather than functional objects; they are reproductions and representations of objects. These journals speak of fashion, interior design and architecture, and taste—discourses that border on the aesthetic experience or may become congruent with it."[33]

Many of the principles that govern *Journals Series* were at work in Knight's installation at American Fine Arts, for the flower arrangements as briefly described previously stood as arbiters of style, commenting directly on the type of restaurant and clientele. At work, then, was a sharp if somewhat duplicitous institutional critique. On one level, the flowers in the restaurants directly related class and taste, fine dining and fine art. Knight's installation included within its own construct as art the myths and fantasies that the restaurants proffered as real. On another level, like wallpaper within restaurant settings, each flower arrangement functioned as architectural design in the dining establishment, operating primarily as a "cleverly devised lubricant" to convey the particular ambience of the institution.[34] No one would have read them as works of art in their original context. However, through their displacement and removal to a SoHo gallery, they were transformed into artworks. The project thus highlighted the function of context in determining meaning.

This idea of a mutual exchange of goods—the restaurants were allowed to pick the bouquet they would loan to American Fine Arts—and the crucial role of context in defining the status of objects, were also manifest in Knight's contribution to *AL(L)READY MADE*. This 1992 group exhibition at Het Kruithuis, Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands, consisted of selected pieces by artists (e.g., Jeff Koons, Haim Steinbach, Guillaume Bijl) working on the legacy of Marcel Duchamp's ready-made strategy as manifest in the latter's *Fountain* of 1917. Initially invited to exhibit his *Museotypes* in this show, Knight instead proposed a project that would engage with the museum's so-called Artothèque program, which rents works of art from the Kruithuis's collection to the public. Knight's project, titled *Ecoaesthetics,* altered the Artothèque by replacing the rental transaction with one of exchange for the duration of the exhibition. A new contract was drawn up by the museum, which specified

that subscribers to the Artothèque should trade a ceramic item (in accordance with the show's reliance on Duchamp's porcelain *Fountain*) from their own personal collection for one of the institution's objects. In this way, many ordinary domestic objects from the community, introduced into the museum as a material sign of Knight's project for this exhibition, would attain the auratic status of art. A certain tone of irreverence is also evident in Knight's project, for it had the secondary effect of taking to task the work of other artists included in *AL(L)READY MADE*. Indeed, by introducing objects with actual use value into the exhibition, Knight's *Ecoaesthetics* not only points emphatically to the overdetermining function of context but also suspends, even if only momentarily, the reified aspect of the work of the "name" artists in this show and allows viewers to see these artists' "sculptural objects" for what they really are. Wasn't this, after all, the effect that Duchamp had in mind when he initially exhibited his *Fountain*?

But there was yet another layer of the contemporary art world that was inverted by Knight's intervention at American Fine Arts. For Knight's project also underscored the limits of exclusive art production as such by substituting a strategy based on the fluid nature of a collaborative exhibition. With the installation becoming a subtle send-up of the group show, Knight himself disappeared beneath the mélange of objects, functioning merely to facilitate the exposure of the work of others. At the same time, as each unique composition fused with the others in the room to culminate in a lush floral spectacle, the installation problematized the practice of privileging curatorial conception over an exhibition's constitutive parts. Knight thus compellingly evoked the recent phenomenon of the "power curators," exhibition organizers who position themselves as the real stars of the shows, coordinating artworks (and those who make them) in a manner not unlike the way artists handle their materials.

From dismantling the inherent presence of the artwork to problematizing the integrity of the artist, from tearing down the artificial parameters of the museum or gallery to interrogating the dominant ideologies, the strategy of semiological inversion has been consistent throughout Knight's career. It is manifest in all of his works to varying degrees on many different levels where it is not a simple flip but a complex set of operations. With the floral installation at American Fine Arts, not only did Knight invert the semiological integrity of the artwork,

artist, exhibition, gallery, and an array of practices and contexts integral to the operation of the institution of art but he also even inverted the genre of the still life in painting, bringing the *nature morte* to life, as it were. For the flowers were not painterly renditions but the real thing. Their "realness" was attested by the fact that the gallery was filled with overwhelming fragrance. Indeed, the olfactory was a new sense to be deconstructed by Knight. And we need to ask in conclusion what the overwhelming scent concealed, keeping in mind that the original use of perfume was to hide the foul odor of unwashed bodies.

Despite a few exceptions, such as the arrangements consisting entirely of dried flowers or the large cactus representing Time Café, the floral compositions exhibited in American Fine Arts had a distinct temporal aspect. Even with attentive care, most of the works would wither away, their ephemeral nature contradicting the idea of a "timeless" creation. Here we are reminded of our initial response upon walking into the space—a sense of the funereal aspect of the work. And if indeed a funereal tone was invoked, the question emerged: whose funeral is it? What was concealed beneath one of the most spectacular shows of the late 1990s, and certainly of Knight's oeuvre? Interestingly enough, of all of Knight's projects, this one went untitled—a title, after all, as with a signature, fixes and stabilizes meaning. As when encountering an unmarked gravestone, we wonder for whom the work was erected, and what has been rendered extinct? One explanation lies in the restaurants themselves, trendy signifiers of the gentrification process that has now been completed in SoHo and is currently marching full force ahead in Chelsea. That in itself would be too simple, however. For it must also be acknowledged that the installation, in whole or in part, entirely defied commodification: when the flowers wilted and died, the work dissipated with them. The experience was ephemeral and nonreproducible; there was nothing that could be defined as an artistic object. Thus the show not only stood as an act of pure defiance to everything the art world had become, but it also summed up the core strategies of Knight's work and his determination to resist reification at all costs, even at the cost of his own career.

Notes

1. George H. W. Bush, 1990, as cited by John Knight on the brochure introducing his project *Worldebt . . . You Can Count on It,* 1999.

2. The exact number of floral displays differed each week because the contributions rotated throughout the duration of the show. However, there were never fewer than twenty-five floral arrangements in the installation.

3. Jean Baudrillard, "Gesture and Signature" (1972), in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981), 103. Baudrillard continues,

> Similarly, the concept of forgery has changed—or rather, it suddenly appears with the advent of modernity. Formerly painters regularly used collaborators or "negros": one specialized in trees, another in animals. The act of painting, and so the signature as well, did not bear the same mythological insistence upon authenticity—that moral imperative to which modern art is dedicated and by which it becomes modern—which has been evident ever since the relation to illustration and hence the very meaning of the artistic object changed with the act of painting itself.

4. These evaluative criteria are also operative in academia and criticism, especially in the humanities where collaborative writing and research is strongly discouraged, even disparaged, in favor of the single-authored work. Of course, in the art world there have been challenges to this dominant paradigm, some of the most successful being the Art Worker's Coalition, the Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, and Group Material in the United States, as well as the Art & Language Collective in the United Kingdom and many others in the Soviet Union and the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. For an informative discussion of collaborative art in the US context, see Gregory Sholette, "News from Nowhere: Activist Art and After," *Third Text* 45 (Winter 1998–99): 45–62.

5. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Knight's Moves: Situating the Art/Object," in *John Knight. MCMLXXXVI*, exhibition catalog (New York: Marian Goodman Gallery, 1986), 9; reprinted in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 292. Reprinted in this volume.

6. In order to inform as large a public as possible about the process of exchange at the core of this project, Knight mounted a broad advertising campaign. As he explained in a short interview just prior to the unfolding of this work, "Advertising, as a subsequent step in the development of this project, will be used as a bridge between the public consciousness at large and the deployment of a work of art. Specifically, an advertising campaign will be waged on the sides of twenty-five buses that will traverse the city for a period of one month. To accompany the ad campaign will be the telephone number of Stroom, which will have a pre-recorded message concerning the nuts and bolts of this project. At the moment when the new bell is to be introduced, a second advertising campaign will be launched. During a one- or two-day period, thousands of tags, similar to those left on your door handle by Chinese take-out food services, will be hung on the handlebars of bicycles throughout the city." Kurt Dillon, "The Site of the Bicycle/Interview with John Knight," *Archis* 5 (1993): 12. For an in-depth discussion of Knight's *De Campagne* project, see Birgit Pelzer, "The Irresistible Appeal of Utility," in *Campagne*, exhibition catalog (Brussels: Encore . . . Bruxelles, 1996), 7–39. Reprinted in this volume.

7. See Charles Sanders Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs," in *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*, ed. Robert Innis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 4–23.

8. Anne Rorimer, "John Knight: Designating the Site," in *John Knight: Treize Travaux*, exhibition catalog (Villeurbanne: Le Nouveau Musée, 1989), 24; reprinted in this

volume. For a detailed description of the operation of Knight's *Federal Style*, see Edward Bryant, "John Knight: *FEDERAL STYLE*," *Artspace: A Magazine of Contemporary Art* 14, no. 2 (January/February 1990): 32–34.

9. Marie-Ange Brayer, "Interview with John Knight," *Artefactum* 9, no. 42 (February–March 1992): 19. Reprinted in this volume.

10. Pelzer, "The Irresistible Appeal of Utility," 16.

11. Rorimer, "John Knight: Designating the Site," 14.

12. Indeed, according to Jacques Derrida, the signature is the first lie, because, "by definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer"—so, too, the corporate version is equally false. See Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context" (1972), in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 328.

13. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1969), in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 126.

14. See Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (1949), in *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 1–7; and Kaja Silverman, "Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look, and Image," in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 125–156.

15. Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 107, as cited in Silverman, "Fassbinder and Lacan," 149: "Only the subject—the human subject, the subject of desire that is the essence of man—is not, unlike the animal, entirely caught up in this imaginary capture. He maps himself in it. How? In so far as he isolates the function of the screen and plays with it. Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze. The screen is here the locus of mediation." My discussion of Silverman's stress on Lacan's concept of the "gaze" is indebted to Keith Moxey, *The Practice of Theory: Poststructuralism, Cultural Politics, and Art History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 46–56.

16. Moxey, *The Practice of Theory*, 55: "The semiotic definition of subjectivity allows for a recognition not only of the incapacity of the symbolic to encompass the real but also of the subject's power to develop an interpretation of the real which was not provided by the symbolic."

17. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1968), 21.

18. For a good description of *Bienvenido* and some of its operations, see John O'Brien, "John Knight: *BIENVENIDO*," *Artspace: A Magazine of Contemporary Art* 15, no. 3 (March–April 1991): 35–38.

19. By "fascism," I mean what Barthes describes as "the performance of a language system": "This object in which power is inscribed, for all of human eternity, is language, or to be more precise, its necessary expression: the language we speak and write. Language is legislation, speech is its code. . . . To speak, and, with even greater reason, to utter a discourse is not, as is too often repeated, to communicate; it is to subjugate. . . . [L]anguage—the performance of a language system—is neither reactionary nor progressive; it is quite simply fascist; for fascism does not prevent speech, it compels speech." Roland Barthes, "Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology, Collège de France, January 7, 1977," trans. Richard Howard, *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 4–5.

20. As Knight informs Brayer concerning his 1991 piece *Treize à la Douzaine*: "It was my intention to re-direct, not inject social content." See Brayer, "Interview with John Knight," 18.

21. According to Peirce's tripartite concept of the sign, the interpretant is the new sign created by the interpreter in the process of understanding. See Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs," 5.

22. When asked in a 1991 interview with Joël Benzakin if he uses "logotypes as a signature," Knight's response was at once enigmatic and revealing, "Do you think we can get away with that?" "Benzakin-Knight," in *John Knight/Haim Steinbach*, exhibition catalog (Brussels: Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1991), 28.

23. Not all of the restaurants adhered to these guidelines: some did not display the plaque, and others substituted duplicate arrangements.

24. The size and location, in fact, were determined by the existing entry into all gallery spaces. That is, the mural actually closed off—negated—the galleries for the duration of the exhibition. As such, instead of the reception area functioning as an entry/passageway into the galleries, it became the sole site of presentation.

25. Kim Gordon, "Turning the Conversation," in *Journal: A Contemporary Art Magazine* 4, no. 40 (Fall 1984): 107. Reprinted in this volume.

26. Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning. Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills" (1970), in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977), 52–68.

27. A full list of participating restaurants is also inscribed on the wall text with the logo *JK*. The restaurants are as follows: Baracco, Barolo, Balthazar, Bond St., Bowery Bar, Capsouto Freres, Cena, Da Silvano, Diva, Frontiere, Lot 61, Luca Lounge, Medusa, Monzu, Monkey Bar, Navia', Odeon, Palicinka, Provence, Rosa Mexicana, Time Café, The Sanctuary, and Zoe.

28. O'Brien, "John Knight: *BIENVENIDO*," 38.

29. As Kim Gordon puts it, "Knight is concerned with the topography of the object. One cannot describe an artwork without describing all events surrounding it." Gordon, "Turning the Conversation," 109.

30. Moxey, *The Practice of Theory*, 36.

31. Dan Graham, "On John Knight's Journals Work," *Journal: A Contemporary Art Magazine* 4, no. 40 (Fall 1984): 110–111; reprinted in "Art as Design," in *Rock My Religion/Dan Graham, Writings and Art Projects, 1965–1990*, ed. Brian Wallis (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 219. Reprinted in this volume.

32. Knight in conversation with Dan Graham, in "On John Knight's Journals Work," 110–111.

33. Buchloh, "Knight's Moves," 291.

34. Knight has often pointed to the powerful function of design within architectural contexts. For instance, in his 1991 interview with Joël Benzakin he elaborates on the importance of design in his work: "In the general sense, people do not have the tendency to consider design a self-contained ideology, but simply a mechanical operation. I happen to disagree. Posed as a mild-mannered reporter on positivist behavior, 'design for better living' is actually a prefabricated mechanism for capital domination. It is possibly the most cleverly devised lubricant used in the linkage between early industrial colonialism and multinational hegemony, the fossil fuel of modernity. It is the monster that stands upon the heads of aboriginal culture." "Benzakin-Knight," 26.

Knight's Negations

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

> Industrial design, a method of organizing production even before it is a method of configuring objects, did away with the residue of utopia inherent in the artistic expression of the avant-garde. Ideology now was not superimposed on artistic operations—the latter were now concrete because they were connected to the real production cycle—but had become an internal part of the operations themselves.
>
> —Manfredo Tafuri[1]

It has proven difficult to imagine what sculpture could be at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and it seems to have become next to impossible to actually produce it. The reasons for its temporary demise or its definitive bankruptcy are manifold. Some are obvious such as the incessant inflation and overproduction of objects of consumption and the resulting vernacular violence in the spaces of everyday life, a suffocating violence of enforced obsolescence that regulates every spatiotemporal order and devalorizes all object relationships. Other reasons for the demise of sculpture remain—for the time being at least—more latent, if not obscure: one could hypothetically point in the direction of sculpture's own recent and frequent collaborations with the forces of spectacle culture and its ideological mediations through postmodern architecture. Or perhaps, one should recognize its opposite: that it is first of all architecture's ruthless acquisition of formerly radical sculptural paradigms that constructs conditions of spatial domination and perceptual control

against which any radical sculptural practice in the present inevitably would have to position itself.

Last, less obvious, but much more powerful in its impact on sculptural theory and practice, might be the increasing extrapolation of almost all previously visible, if not tangible, economic and material processes of production and exchange onto a heretofore unimagined level of electronic and digital abstraction, generating an all-encompassing mirage of a transformation of matter into its mathematical potencies. Whatever spatial relations and material forms one might still experience outside of the registers of the overproduction of objects, the spectacularized spaces of control, and electronic digitalization, they now appear merely as abandoned zones, as residual objects and leftover spaces, rather than as elementary givens from which new spatial parameters and new object relations could be configured in sculptural terms in the present.

Sculpture's plethora, the multiplicity of its transformations, and the frequency with which it has modified its morphologies and object positions within the last thirty years alone are therefore not solely the signs of a prolific productivity. Rather, they also appear to be the desperate responses to the rapidity with which corporate enterprise and its architecture—the two most violent forces that have abrogated even the last remnants of spaces and temporalities that were once experienced as the public sphere and its social forms of interaction and communication—have reclaimed and recruited almost all of the new object types and spatial relations that recent sculpture had opened up (from the antimonuments of Claes Oldenburg and the phenomenological sculpture of Richard Serra to the Foucauldian pavilions of Dan Graham).

One crucial example from recent history would be the fate of phenomenology, which had informed the best of Minimal and Post-Minimal sculptural work from Robert Morris to Eva Hesse and Bruce Nauman: their radicality presumed the constitution of an emancipated spectator whose encounters with immediacy and presence would transcend all forms of preestablished conventions, stylistic morphologies, and aesthetic norms in the pure and spontaneous practice of embodied perception. Thirty years later it is precisely this radical phenomenological neutrality that has been abrogated. Either epigones such as Rachel Whiteread and Kiki Smith have reinvested the legacies of phenomenology with a retrograde appeal of figuration and literariness, or it has been recruited for contemporary architectural fusions of spatial control and

spectacle (e.g., Richard Meier's Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art or Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao).

The other, even more problematic example would be the fate of institutional critique and its sculptural practices in the recent proliferation of a new type of installation sculpture (e.g., from Jorge Pardo to Andrea Zittel). These artists actually pretend to have taken on the legacy of the most radical models of institutional critique developed from the late 1960s through the mid-1980s. De facto, contemporary installation sculpture defines itself, however, either affirmatively or cynically as mere décor (as Marcel Broodthaers had prognostically identified this prospect already in the early 1970s). Rather than criticizing and dismantling sculpture's submission to the discourses of design and architectural spectacle, these contemporary installation practices affirm and accelerate its definitive merger with the spatial reproductions of ideology.

By contrast, the practices of institutional critique, developed in the work of Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, and John Knight (among others) since the late 1960s, had formulated a radically different sculptural episteme emphasizing that the discourses of sculpture, architecture, and of design would have to be subjected simultaneously to a systematic critical analysis. Thus, their motivation for an apparent synthesis of the traditional genres of sculptural production, of design, and of architecture was not at all comparable to that of the historical avant-gardes of the 1920s. At that moment, progressivist artists and architects had still envisaged fusing the various disciplines of the production of objects and spaces, hoping that their joined forces would initiate a sociopolitical transformation of everyday life under the sign of a universalized access to maximized conditions of use value.

Knight's disciplinary synthesis (or rather, his polemical collapse of the distinction of sculpture, architecture, and design) argued first of all that any strict segregation between sculpture as an autonomous discursive object (suspended between material production and visual representation) and design as its socially and ideologically utilitarian other could no longer be upheld under current historical circumstances when both had entered the primary condition of sign exchange value. At the same time Knight's work argued that sculptural practice would now have to dismantle the traditional split in the theorization of *space:* if the more recent theorizations of sculptural space had been conceived as virtual or phenomenological (e.g., the spaces of Minimal—and Post-Minimal—sculpture), this

definition could only be maintained by repressing the actually existing ideological usages of space, concretized in the social institutions as sites of domination and as *dispositifs* of control.

Inasmuch as sculpture can still be conceived at all as a reflection upon the continuous changes of object relations and of the conditions of spatial experience, Knight's practice articulates these transformations with seismographic precision, with retrospective lucidity, and with uncanny foresight. If the prevailing conditions of spatial experience can still be discerned and represented with sculptural means at all, Knight's work since the 1970s has consistently engaged with the analysis of the conditions of public space, the forms of object experience permitted and solicited in those spaces, and the displacement of spatial experiences by structures of commodity production and exchange.

From its inception, Knight's work has contested both the traditional dimensions of the sculpture of his contemporaries and the discursive limitations of the models of site specificity and institutional critique that had been developed by artists and critics close to the sculptural production of the late 1960s. Therefore site, in Knight's practice since the mid-1970s, is first of all defined as an intersection of spatial containers and ideological investments, of social relations of exchange and communication (or the absence and impossibility thereof) inasmuch as these relations can be concretized in spatial form. Accordingly, site specificity for Knight has always been defined not just as a critical reflection of a particular physical location and "place" (in the definition that it had initially acquired in Minimalism) but rather as an analysis of precisely those knots where the intertwinements of the various spatial, material, and semiotic strands and the structuring devices of social relations of production and consumption emerge.

Although social relations remain of course deeply determined by production, it is precisely not the heroicized and mythified model of industrial production that can nowadays credibly serve as a sculptural articulation of the experience of objects and spaces. Rather, sculpture has to be situated at the intersection of services supplied, of objects of consumption delivered and acquired, of identifications sustained within various registers of sign exchange value and ideological suture: all of these elements currently seem to determine the primary experience of object relations and of public spaces.

Accordingly, Knight's work suggests that sculptural production at this point in history has to be reduced to a montage of negations in order to operate as a construction analogous to the actual absence of any experience of "public space." Thus, rather than insisting on a conception of sculpture as production (in the manner that most of Knight's Post-Minimalist peers still had insisted, maintaining "production" as the foundation of sculpture), Knight's work is first of all structured around the negation of any type of traditional production (artisanal, artistic, architectural, industrial) and the simultaneous absence of any type of conventional sculptural materiality. In an exact analogy, the works' procedures of structuring spectatorial experience negate any promise that sculpture might facilitate an immediate access to the material or phenomenological constitution of the self or to the experience of unalienated social relations. Instead they appear to originate in the matrices of institutional frameworks and their procedures in a bureaucratic sphere of legal contracts and of administrative negotiations; indeed, they serve as mock interventions or mimetic reenactments (comparable in that with the work of Michael Asher).[2] Thus one could argue that Knight's negations, generating the absence of sculptural objects and the lack of spectatorial interaction, are the result of both, a refusal and a historical inaccessibility.

Two recent examples from Knight's radical redefinition of sculptural production are his untitled installation at American Fine Arts, Co. in 1998, and the 1999 installation at the Storm King Art Center titled *87°*. An examination of these projects might illuminate my suggested arguments (if the arguments do not in fact emerge from the reading of this work in the first place). For American Fine Arts, Co. the artist suggested assembling an exhibition from the temporary loans of flower bouquets that were usually on display in a variety of fashionable upscale Manhattan restaurants. Although it was the artist who had initially selected the contributing restaurants and it was the task of the dealer to negotiate their participation, in actuality the work came about in a much more serendipitous fashion (albeit turning out not any less poignant for it).

The majority of the restaurants that Knight had originally envisaged as contributors simply refused the dealer's solicitation to participate in what must have appeared to them as a rather unusual request. Therefore, left to his own resources, it took the missionary skills of the artist to convince a good two dozen restaurants to participate in the project after

John Knight, Project for American Fine Arts, Co., 1998, detail.

all. Not only were they asked to agree to have their weekly flower décor delivered to the gallery, instead of having it installed on their own premises—and here lay, of course, one of the problems—but they also had to commit themselves to having the bouquet renewed on a weekly basis and to demarcate the vacated space with a caption card explaining the bouquet's absence, giving the reasons for its displacement, and describing its present location.

The first question posed by this work might be whether flower bouquets could or should ever qualify as sculptural materials. (To ask the reverse question, to identify the reasons why they could possibly *not* qualify is in fact more productive). Yet, although flowers as sculptural material are in fact rare and unusual, there are some artistic precedents for the use of plants and flower bouquets in sculptural and spatial installations. One of the first examples, known to us at least, dates back to the early 1960s when George Brecht proposed to arrange flowers on a piano as one of his performative sculptures (*Piano Piece,* 1961).[3] In contradistinction to the strategy of the Fluxus artist, however, Knight's deployment of the semiotics of the "natural" emphasizes first of all his engagement with the materials and production procedures of sculpture as cultural and semiotic conventions, rather than, as was the case with George Brecht, as a spatiotemporal performance.

Second, Knight's proposition to situate his arrangement of flowers in the sites and discursive registers of "sculpture" places his project explicitly within the traditional opposition of natural versus aesthetic beauty. Unlike the most outlandish ready-mades, flowers—unless painted or photographed—have been and remain for the most part an untouchable taboo in the artistic (certainly the sculptural) practices of Modernism and the present (as opposed to Japanese culture for example where the arrangement of flowers in the rites of *ikebana* is socially and aesthetically held to be as important as the folding of paper, the preparation of tea, calligraphic inscription, or the making of sculpture). This ban on flowers is not only the result of their inextricable link with "nature," their decorative potential for auspicious celebrations of "life," but also, inevitably, a result of their association with funereal functions. Third, and possibly worse yet, the prohibition results no doubt from the ancient synonymity of flowers with a patriarchal ideologem of passive natural feminine beauty, a perspective that makes flowers appear as particularly incompatible with the traditionally masculinist connotations of sculptural production.

Yet, Knight's installation generates still another set of disturbances: not only the proposition that flowers should be considered as "sculptural" objects, but worse, that "nature" should be considered as a sculptural "sign." This proposition would generally be perceived as a contradiction in terms because a natural object can become a sign only when it has been sufficiently mediated through a process of representation production, and—until the arrival of Kounellis—biological organisms, let alone living creatures, did not qualify for the episteme of the ready-made.

Paradoxically, however, flower arrangements in institutional spaces such as upscale restaurants and museum lobbies have become precisely that: spectacular signs and advertisement structures. They are as far removed from mere nature as any technologically produced object, and therefore they fully qualify as one other sign/object among an infinity of potential sculptural ready-mades. Their semiotic obscenity, however, results not only from the unabashed display of luxurious waste but perhaps even more so from their ostentatious gesticulation of mastery disguised as a sheer celebration of nature. Even as a spectacular display of luxury the bouquet is still surpassed by its substitutional character as a manifest marker of institutional or corporate identity. This then is the historical specificity of the flower bouquet even before it acquires its "aesthetic" dimension once Knight's flower sculptures have entered the gallery space.

To the extent that the presence of flowers as a sculptural arrangement in a gallery is perturbing to the gallery visitor, if not outright abject, the absence of the bouquet from a restaurant's (or a museum's) premises is even more intolerable because the public identity of their enterprises requires rigorous decoration. Especially in the larger museums in major cities, the presence of exorbitantly costly flower arrangements in the lobby spaces has become *one* if not *the* hallmark of an institution's initial visibility. (One might wonder what these ostentations lobby bouquets actually celebrate—whether they don't first of all congratulate a class on its proper status in leisure and luxury—because, by contrast, flowers would not be considered appropriate at the workplace in a factory, for example, nor even in the reading rooms of libraries and universities).

Knight's interlacing of the spaces of the gallery and the restaurant administers withdrawal and austerity to the one and infuses opulence and decoration into the other, in exact reversal of each space's own traditionally kept program. By playing havoc with the conventions of the

gallery and the object status of sculpture, Knight's "flower arrangement"[4] denounces first of all the gallery's spatial claims for purity and radicality. At the same time it devalorizes sculpture's discursive claims for autonomous object production and uncontaminated perception by revealing the actually prevailing entwinement between apparently incompatible spaces and practices.

Thus—as in all of Knight's key works—it is crucial to recognize what one could call the installation's chiasmic structure, symmetrically linking elements that had been traditionally conceived as mutually exclusive opposites. This newly established, uncanny symmetry structuring Knight's project erodes the traditional exhibition value specific to both institutions, the gallery and the restaurant, only to see it simultaneously and grotesquely increased against the institutions' own interests and conventions. Thus, both acquire uncanny similarities along an axis of the décor, articulating to what extent aesthetic practice, once a critical, cognitive, and philosophical category, has now become entirely confined to the social rituals of leisure-time entertainment and ideological affirmation.

If Knight had calculated that the abject material of odorous or almost putrefied flowers would eventually scandalize sculptors and gallery visitors alike, he probably had also assumed that the space's sudden funereal appearance would inevitably be read as a prognostic commentary on the actual situation of the traditional art world institutions, in particular, galleries engaged with difficult contemporary practices. Thus, as to be expected, Knight's sculptural chiasmus works in the opposite direction as well. The flower installation's cumulative effect is that of a *pompes funèbres,* enforcing the melancholic discovery that the gallery as a space once committed to aesthetic production and experience has become just one more site in the ever-increasing arsenal of spaces where narcissistic subjects can ostentatiously celebrate seemingly hard-won class privilege.

Knight's project, entitled *87°,* installed at the Storm King Art Center in 1999—which is, in fact, the occasion for the publication of this document—originated from a triadic proposal that was to include a project each by Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, and John Knight, thereby bringing together three of the key artistic figures whose work is now generally positioned within a larger context of Post-Minimal and Conceptual practices, identified as both site specific and as critical of institutional and discursive frameworks. To clarify whether it is at this point still justified to

refer to the work of these artists in terms of site specificity or institutional critique, whether the artists themselves have moved beyond these parameters, or whether historical circumstances have in fact surpassed these positions will be one of the tasks of the remainder of this essay.

Immediately following the project at American Fine Arts, Co., Knight's permanent installation for Storm King Art Center constructs an even greater range of discursive layers, turning even the mere act of description into an interpretive archeology. In terms of site alone, Knight's work at Storm King faced a dilemma rather different from that of the contemporary gallery: that of a sculpture garden, an institution defined within a dual mythology. On the one hand, its (self)-image in the twentieth century was that of a pastoral space of leisure and cultivated nature. As such it was commonly placed outside of the domains of labor and the architecture of production. The sculpture garden can be either walled off from the city, like that of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, or it can be ostentatiously situated outside of the spheres of everyday life altogether, as is the case with the Storm King Art Center. (It would be hard to imagine a sculpture garden adjacent to the Ford factory in Detroit.)

On the other hand, inside the garden itself, some of the crucial examples of contemporary sculptural practice (from the work of Mark di Suvero to that of Richard Serra) engage with structural forms, materials, and procedures (and their impact on sculpture) that were not too long ago considered to be among the most advanced technologies of industrial construction. Thus Knight's *87°* contemplates first of all the site's hybridity, its condition as a public space that acts simultaneously as a museum and as a park, as a pastoral preindustrial landscape setting that houses an accumulation of sculptural structures that hover between the registers of artisanal manufacture and industrial production.

The first element of Knight's installation encountered by the spectators at Storm King is a telescope positioned by the artist on a small outdoor mound in an area surrounding the art center's reception and indoor exhibition spaces.[5] As a technoscientific object that focuses vision and enables its telescopic extension, this device forcefully asserts its place and utilitarian functions among the sculptures in its immediate vicinity (e.g., a work by David Smith and one by Ursula von Rydingsvard). Yet not only does the telescope's presence challenge the ruling paradigm of the adjacent sculptures, but it also perturbs the homogeneity of the

John Knight, *87°*, 1999–, Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York, detail, 2000. Courtesy: Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York. Photo: Jerry L. Thompson.

"naturalized" gaze imposed by the landscaped setting. As a mere "device" of looking (and, in this case, of the estrangement of the conventions of vision), it could neither be mistaken as a sculpture in its own right, nor would it easily qualify as a ready-made. Rather, the technoscientific artificiality and the technical functions of the instrument defamiliarize the "naturalness" of vision, presumed to be operative in this pastoral site where nature and culture supposedly have been integrated. At the same time, the telescope extrapolates the spectator's attention from the actual site of the sculpture garden and projects "vision" literally beyond the park's physical and institutional boundaries, precisely into the very realm of everyday life that the park's mission and spatial organization had attempted to obliterate.

One particular position on the compass rose attached to the base of the telescope (demarcated, as the title of the work announces, at *87°*) alerts the spectator to the second element designated by Knight as an integral part of his "installation." Peering through the telescope at that degree, the spectator discovers the light-reflecting metal sphere of an aluminum-colored water tower, hovering—as though suspended—in the center of the instrument's viewing frame.[6] It is this visual suspension that induces a first, almost contemplative view, reflecting sculpture's capacities (or inabilities) to articulate the moment of transition from the ideology of an age of industrial production to an ideology of a postindustrial age, governed by services and consumption alone.

Once the water tower has been more clearly discerned and stabilized by the spectator, a second, almost ironical understanding of the vista occurs: the actual object, a rather sleek structure made by an architectural firm in Chicago in 1958, in its centered calm seems superior to the dramatic gesticulations of the large-scale sculptures still engaged with the discourse of sculpture under industrial production. Even a neutral observer who discusses all of the works at Storm King in equally laudatory terms recognizes in a recent essay the astonishingly "monumental"

The water tower of the former Star Expansion Company as seen through the binoculars, 2000. Courtesy: Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York. Photo: Jerry L. Thompson.

qualities of the water tower and reports that the patrons' original decision to have this particular model installed was largely determined by "aesthetic" criteria:

> When Ralph E. Ogden and H. Peter Stern had installed the water tower in 1958, they envisioned the monumentally scaled structure (over 100 feet high) as more than a purely utilitarian object. The cost was double that of an ordinary water tower. In retrospect, it was their first aesthetic endeavor.[7]

The former Star Expansion Company plant and water tower as seen from across the New York State Thruway, 2000. Courtesy: Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York. Photo: Jerry L. Thompson.

Knight's work thus solicits a comparison between the resident sculptures and the external industrial structure, more specifically between their forms, materials, surfaces, and production procedures. First of all, the perfect spherical shape of the water tower opposes Knight's "object" to the morphology of the park's sculptures, which proudly feature the dramatic irregularities of their relational and compositional weight distribution (often the result of hidden devices of suspension and structural support). A second and equally striking comparison occurs on the level of material: the water tower—because of its carefully and regularly applied coating—appears to be made from aluminum (though it is actually constructed from steel). Thus it conveys a sense of lightness and light reflexivity that are traditionally associated with the design of airplanes and the packaging of consumer goods rather than with sculptural gravity. As such it is of a historical order distinctly different from the welded iron constructions and Cor-ten steel aesthetic that the majority of sculptures in the park still adhere to. In fact, Knight's work seems to programmatically negate the claim that sculpture on the level of morphology, materials, and procedures could still be linked to a latent order of (masculinist) industrial production, as an analogon to industrial labor.

Knight's choice of the water tower seems to suggest that sculpture at this point in history should be considered an object of design production articulating its inextricable entanglement with the orders of consumption and of services. By repositioning sculpture within an aesthetic of the anonymously manufactured utilitarian object—the legacies of the ready-made—Knight makes the language of design the focus of his reflection on the historical conditions of sculpture. Yet, paradoxically, rather than merely inscribing itself mimetically within a mythical relation to production and aestheticizing industry, Knight's sculptural object remains a public structure, serving its purposes and performing its daily productive functions.

Thus Knight introduces a counterfigure into the perception of the garden's paradox, inverting that institution's terms on every account. If sculpture inside the garden had inscribed itself mimetically into a register of industrial production, Knight's work suddenly displaces that paradigm by substituting an actually functioning industrial object outside of the park's perimeters. If spectators flock to the park as a space of leisure in order to find relief from the instrumentalization of the spaces and temporalities of everyday life, in Knight's work they find themselves

confronted not only with functioning utilitarian structures (the telescope and the water tower), but they are also invited to remember the actual economic foundation of the sculpture park's mirage of leisure in nature.

At this point, Knight's particular choice of the water tower as an object of industrial design and of functional utilitarian architecture inevitably generates another comparison with an artistic project that seems to have been at least partially motivated by the melancholic contemplation of sculpture's past aspirations toward the dimension of collective use value. Similar to Knight's skepticism with regard to the continuing credibility of the paradigm of industrial production as the foundation for contemporary sculpture, the doubts incited by the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher have circulated for decades around these seemingly unresolvable questions of how sculpture could maintain its claims for "publicness" of collective experience without succumbing to advertisement and propaganda, how it could aspire to architecture without serving the interests of spectacle, and how it could recognize the collective participation in the production process without mythifying and fetishizing industrial labor.

Thus, in the last comparison, the complexity of Knight's sculptural paradigms becomes even more transparent: suspended, on the one hand, between the muscular industrialism of Minimalists and Post-Minimalists in whose work—as we have argued—the metaphors of virility, of production, and of industry had still governed procedures and materials of sculpture and, on the other hand, the melancholic position of the Bechers in whose photographic documentation the waning of the age of industry is apparently bemoaned as much as the disappearance of the possibilities of sculptural production.

Knight's work repositions "sculpture" within a different register, that of a *détournement* of existing conditions of object experience and operative forms of spatial organization.[8] Knight's installations thus function in the manner of a sculptural montage linking different social spaces and different discourses within which objects are constituted and confined. His work makes it compellingly plausible that in such a definition of sculpture an actual sculptural object is no longer conceivable. It is in this negation that Knight's dialectical approach originates, a dialectic that integrates a manifest refusal to deliver a fraudulent sculptural object with a programmatically declared absence (and inaccessibility) of certain forms of public and material experience that sculpture had traditionally provided.

This absence of sculptural object production and Knight's refusal to substitute for it the parameters of the new genre of installation (with its persistent oscillation among entertainment architecture, showroom design, and theatrical stage set) articulate precisely the discursive void that corresponds to the experiential absence of public space and to the lack of an elementary sociality once aspired to within its perimeters. Inasmuch as radical sculpture promises an object without exchange value, a structure outside of domination, an architecture of simultaneous collective perception beyond décor and product propaganda, and inasmuch as none of these models can even be conceived anymore, it is only in a montage of negations as Knight assembles them that a last glimpse of the practice of sculpture in the present could be caught.

Notes

1. Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigia La Penta (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), 98.

2. In a slightly different way these criteria of an administrative structuring of sculptural spatial experience (in his case by linguistic means alone) would apply as well to the work of Lawrence Weiner, who has always insisted on being recognized as having proposed a sculptural rather than a textual or conceptual model alone.

3. Later one could think of the use of cacti in the work of Jannis Kounellis and the display of potted palms in the décors by Marcel Broodthaers in the late 1960s. Another artist who has frequently deployed flower bouquets or potted plants in her installations—undoubtedly for very different reasons—is Jacqueline Dauriac, in works such as *Hommage à Henri Matisse,* 1987, or *Hommage à Madame Gisèle Guillory, Fleuriste aux Halles Centrales de Rennes,* 1987. One only would have to think of suggesting the usage of flowers or potted plants to sculptors such as Richard Serra or Carl Andre in order to recognize the profoundly subversive implications of Knight's work within the discursive conventions of Post-Minimal sculpture.

4. There is, of course, a startling predecessor in terms of a pun on "flower arrangements" in the work of Bruce Nauman. *Flour Arrangement,* executed in 1967, consisted, as a distributional sculpture, of random quantities of flour disseminated in a doorstep to be distributed by means of the pedestrian traffic entering and leaving the space.

5. As in almost all instances of a radical modification of an artistic convention, a predecessor for Knight's peculiar object choice of a telescope could come to mind as well. We are thinking specifically of the installation of Daniel Buren at the Centre Georges Pompidou/Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris in 1975 entitled *Les Couleurs (Sculptures).* In this work Buren deployed the telescopes that had been installed on the rooftops of the Beaubourg building for the sight-seeing delights of its ever-increasing numbers of touristic visitors so that they could also inspect Buren's own installation of striped elements dispersed in the form of flags across a large number of buildings in the vicinity of Beaubourg. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, ed., *Daniel Buren: Les Formes (Peintures), Les Couleurs (Sculptures)* (Paris: Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou/Musée

National d'Art Moderne; Halifax: The Press of The Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1978). [The Nova Scotia Series. Source Materials of the Contemporary Arts, ed. by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, volume 4. —Ed.]

6. The actual water tower is situated about a mile outside of the park in the compound of an industrial enterprise neighboring onto the sculpture garden (in fact, on the grounds of the Star Expansion Company, whose principals, Ralph E. Ogden and H. Peter Stern, were also the initial patrons founding and financing the Storm King sculpture garden project). H. Peter Stern continues to serve as the president and chairman of the board of trustees of the Storm King Art Center.

7. Joan Pachner, "Visions and Vistas: A Sculpture Collection Evolves at the Storm King Art Center," in *Earth, Sky, and Sculpture: Storm King Art Center* (Mountainville, NY: Storm King Art Center, 2000), 199.

8. It is almost inevitable to make yet another comparison, one in which it becomes obvious to what extent the presence of the industrial paradigm haunts sculptural production up to this very moment. In choosing exactly the object type that has been of central concern to the Bechers for the last forty-some years and that is the singular object of Knight's installation, Rachel Whiteread's recent polyester-resin cast of one of the wood water towers typical for New York's downtown water supply adds yet another layer to this debate. What drives Whiteread's project is, of course, a profoundly conciliatory, if not a fraudulent, sentiment whose immediate success with collectors and art world institutions is currently guaranteed. The work is fraudulent first of all with regard to the nature of the casting process itself. (It remystifies and aestheticizes the index whose project in artistic practices from Duchamp to Bruce Nauman had always been one of a radical materialist phenomenology and one of defetishization.) At the same time Whiteread's choice of a quaint nostalgically charged industrial object exoticizes and sentimentalizes the industrial object itself (and with that, by implication, the existential conditions of industrialization at large). Worst of all is, of course, Whiteread's fraudulence with regard to a newly opened wellspring of sculptural production, with the reflections on the conditions and availability of sculpture both as palliative and placebo.

Displacing the Site: John Knight and the Museum as Modulation

André Rottmann

Circuits of Control

If "institutional critique" can be defined as a reflexive engagement with both the symbolic and material structures that determine the conditions of artistic production and aesthetic experience at a specific site, the projects of John Knight since the late 1960s have demonstrated that it has become increasingly problematic, if not outright impossible, to conceive of this very site as an architectural space or physical place. According to Craig Owens, the paradigm shift "from work to frame" that occurred during that period in the work of figures such as Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, and Hans Haacke consisted from the outset in critically treating the frame "as that network of institutional practices . . . that define, circumscribe and contain both artistic production and reception."[1] Knight's work certainly partakes in this decisive epistemological rupture of the postwar period and the systematic challenge it posed to categories such as object, medium, and site. However, it has identified, analyzed, and contested the parameters and discourses of contemporary art with unrivaled consequences. If Knight's practice, which around 1969 began with a critical close reading of Minimalism, has established a distinct methodology of site specificity over the years, its trajectory is at the same time characterized by a more thorough resistance toward the confinements of cultural representation than the shift from work to frame would be able to initiate. As his projects continue to foray into the fields of media, design, and global politics, they frequently stretch beyond the enclosed spaces of the museum or gallery,

or, at the very least, consistently tend to effectively exceed both their architectural and discursive boundaries. Not only do they depart from "an acknowledgement of the role of the container in determining the shape of what it contains,"[2] as Owens has observed with regard to the "museum fictions" of Broodthaers, they are decidedly situated "within the actually existing economical and ideological force fields,"[3] and to this end they employ the much more vast network of communication systems as their conceptual basis, aesthetic model, and circuit of distribution.

It is partly due to this particularity that Knight's oeuvre defies notions of stylistic coherence and instant recognizability. Neither the radical expansion of painting nor sculpture, which Knight once ironically qualified as "working on the custodial conditions of art history,"[4] are prominent concerns in his practice of institutional critique. Instead of distinctive formalist features that explicitly relate to the history of pictorial abstraction, as could be argued for the work of Buren, readymades as diverse as carpenters' levels, flower arrangements, doormats, flags, electric blankets, empty flag poles, or devices as such mirrors, video cameras, monitors, and overhead projectors have all functioned as mediums for Knight. Occasionally eschewing the appropriation, production, and display of aesthetic objects and the support of the art apparatus altogether, his projects enact a rigorous displacement of institutional sites instead of laying bare their conventions of display or codes of conduct in situ alone. In this regard they also venture beyond the realm of "situational aesthetics" as it has been defined by Asher, probably the artist's closest ally, vis-à-vis the matrix of the viewer's phenomenological experience in the aftermath of Minimalism.[5] By consequence, not only plaques, placards, and billboards but also media that *per definitionem* are not bound to one specific place or experiential situation, such as diagrams, mailing lists, subscription forms, credits cards, journals, postcards, ads, logotypes, index cards, and phone numbers, gain prominence in Knight's work and substitute traditional artistic formats, materials, and morphologies.[6]

It is this strategy that makes John Knight one of the most radical yet elusive figures within the historical formation of art after Conceptualism. In terms of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, he certainly qualifies as one of those prolific artists who occupy a "minor" position, evidently not regarding art historical significance or critical reputation, but "on

account of their relation of proximity to the movements and categories engendered by major history and because of the unceasing pressure that they exert upon them."[7] As Knight succinctly noted in an interview with Marie-Ange Brayer in 1992 about the absence of an immediately identifiable formal vocabulary in his practice: "By definition, the medium is a conduit, not a calling card."[8] The facticity of discourses, codes, images, writings, and numbers in various formats and media in Knight's oeuvre hence supersedes conventional criteria of form, style, and materiality. Circulation takes precedence over confinement.

In other words, by inserting itself into existing economical and ideological force fields and media conduits, Knight's practice registers and confronts the passage from discipline to control that has been in progress ever since the late 1960s. As his works programmatically rely on the technologies, charts, records, and corporate signs that defy enclosure and shape what Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has famously coined the "aesthetics of administration,"[9] they appear to be grounded in the critical insight that other than disciplinary modes of containment control operates across decentered networks. Instead of passing from one isomorphic space to another, Gilles Deleuze has argued in his "Postscript on Control Societies"[10] that subjects find themselves at once set free and tracked. The domain of the aesthetic is evidently far from being excluded in this regard.[11] The notorious "dematerialization of the art object" in Conceptualism and its legacy—the redefinition of the art object in terms of novel communication media and proliferating new advertising strategies—marks the historical moment at which contemporary art enters the circuits of control.[12] In this way artistic practices are irreversibly imbricated with the "network of techniques and institutions that address, store and process the relevant data of a given culture," as Friedrich A. Kittler has defined *Aufschreibesystem*.[13] Kittler's concept, developed in the early 1980s and shortly thereafter translated into English as "Discourse Networks," is closely connected to that of control; both share the impulse to account for dispersive constellations of cultural techniques, media, institutions, and discourses in their effects, for instance, on subject formations and tenets of cultural production.[14] In light of artistic practices that since the late 1960s are exceedingly dependent on and, at least to a heretofore unequaled degree, modeled after information and inscription technologies, as well as publicity, archival, legal, and corporate aesthetics—in short signal a "post-medium condition"[15]—Kittler's

version of media history in tandem with Deleuze's "Postscript" can provide a theoretical model to fathom out the forces, which continue to transfigure artistic practices in the face of prevalent aesthetics of administration.[16] John Knight's oeuvre has explored and countered contemporary art's intricate rapport with "discourse networks" in control societies with canny foresight.[17]

Knight's work *Museotypes* consists of reconfigurations of the ground plans of sixty contemporary art museums as cobalt blue, eccentric geometric shapes at the center of gold-rimmed china plates. Almost three decades after its initial presentation at the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, an updated version was on view at Greene Naftali gallery in New York in 2011, paradoxically in an expanded yet fragmented form as *Autotypes,* a work in situ. In revisiting his project, the artist decided to present recent extensions to museum buildings, hovering across the porcelain surfaces as blue rectangles, circles, blots, or jagged lines. The project in both of its versions apparently departs from the observation that the museum has long ceased to occupy the privileged position traditionally assigned to it in the cultural realm of the bourgeois public sphere. Following from this, it significantly differs from those artistic practices within the practice and legacy of institutional critique for which the contemporary art museum—or gallery space—has functioned as a primary site of intervention. As it reappears at a different cultural, political, and technological moment, it nevertheless suggests that it is more essential and challenging than ever to gauge the museum's specific policies and renewed topicality.

Since its inception around 1800 within the political economy of colonialism and imperialism, the art museum, as Douglas Crimp has argued, following Foucault's seminal studies of the archeology of human sciences, was bound up with "knowledge-power."[18] Due to this fact, the museum from its very beginning was founded on the techniques of storage, cataloging, and archiving, though this apparatus at the basis of the exhibition of objects and images remained hidden from view due to the institution's ideological claims for art's autonomy and disinterestedness. In turn, the premises of the museum's presentational strategies, architectural conditions, politics of collecting, pedagogical ideals, and protocols of administration were crucial parameters in the formation of institutionally critical art as a site specific methodology. By the same token, Knight's projects have from the beginning been thoroughgoing

John Knight, *Autotypes,* 2011, installation view, Greene Naftali, New York. Courtesy: The artist and Greene Naftali, New York. Photo: John Berens.

in their contextual acuity, making the broader *Aufschreibesystem,* with which the museum as a privileged place of cultural communication—despite appearances—has always coalesced, tangible in its contemporarily changed effects on the production, presentation, and perception of art. The singularity of their epistemological thrust lies in the early realization that the deterritorializing forces, which result from and propel those networks that address, store, and process the relevant data of postwar culture, have attained a hitherto inconceivable level of intensity under the conditions of control—with dramatic consequences not the least for the museum's former reputation as an exclusive site of education, or even enlightenment.

Knight's *Museotypes* thus had almost oracular qualities when first conceived in 1983. The ramifications both of this work and its resurgence as *Autotypes* for an adequate understanding of the role of the museum and its genealogy, as well the artistic methodology of institutional critique are complex and manifold. They more specifically pertain to the irrefutably altered significance of the ready-made paradigm; in addition, they concern the notion of decoration in terms of the

foundational relationship between avant-garde models of abstraction and discourse networks. Furthermore, the project points to the question of the logotype as a central category in Knight's overall practice during the past three decades that deserves to be reviewed more comprehensively. Finally, Knight's work requires us to account for the effects of the displacement of the mnemonic functions of visual art and its institutions by the advent of electronic and digital media that facilitate today's control mechanisms.

Ciphers of Abstraction

From today's vantage point, Knight's recourse to the realm of decorative arts in the form of derivative souvenir items has broader implication than the reversal of the traditional hierarchy of "high" and "low" or an introduction of "nonart" objects into the museum or gallery system.[19] By far exceeding the definition of the assisted ready-made, Knight's customized plates, as they were installed in series on the wall and in vitrines both in 1983 and 2011, leave no doubt that the dialectic between the exhibition and use value of a mass-produced object that had propelled the avant-gardes and their *Nachleben* has lost its viability. At equal distance to the melancholia associated with the discarded yet poetically resurrected *objet trouvé* of Surrealism and the utilitarian dimension of the commodity emphasized with acerbic irony by Marcel Duchamp to substitute for the aesthetic value of traditional artworks, these collectibles obviously were manufactured only to be showcased, whether above a mantel or in an art space. Clear distinctions among quotidian functionality, design concerns, and artistic ambitions are hence blurred. This collapse of criteria—as is so often humorously exacerbated by Knight—is characteristic, in Deleuzian terms, of an essentially dispersive capitalism predicated on the marketing of products and selling of services rather than concentrated industrial production and trade of raw materials.[20] The artist's use of the ready-made "as a manifest marker of institutional or corporate identity,"[21] in other words, seismically registers the profound mutation capitalism is undergoing in Western control societies and negotiates its repercussions for advanced artistic practices.

By recoding museum floor plans as decorative motifs, Knight ignites a reflection on the sociopolitical correlates and changed currency of abstraction as a pictorial episteme. If nonfigurative painterly compositions

John Knight, *Autotypes,* 2011, installation view, Greene Naftali, New York. Courtesy: The artist and Greene Naftali, New York. Photo: John Berens.

once radically transcended the materiality of modern society or depicted its rationale in negative terms exactly by their refusal of traditional representation, this conceptual scaffolding, as Sven Lütticken has argued, definitely became untenable in the second half of the twentieth century; movements such as the Bauhaus had already designed products whose ornamental surfaces were clearly indebted to industrial technologies and mechanical apparatuses that prefigure today's digital programs.[22] In today's *Aufschreibesystem,* which seamlessly integrates all visual media and computers—the very machines that according to Deleuze operate societies of control[23]—abstraction takes on a resonance that almost amounts to the Pyrrhic victory of the avant-garde's utopian thought: "Abstract art was based on the supposition that abstracting from visible appearances enabled one to reach a higher truth, but now abstraction penetrates society to the core."[24] In this situation abstraction in the visual arts cannot but function as ornament bereft of any critical (though lasting market) value. Herein lies one of the reasons for the prominence of the notion of decoration in institutional-critical practices that expose the impact of social, political, and economic forces on artistic production,

exhibition, or distribution—rather than falling prey to the illusion that it could be possible to transcend or negate them.

It is suggestive in this respect that Broodthaers called his last installation, from 1975, *Décor: A Conquest,* linking military with avant-garde maneuvers in a parodic reconstruction of the Battle of Waterloo, juxtaposing the apparatuses of warfare from the period of the modern museum's foundation with the domestic furniture and elements of a refined bourgeois interior.[25] Likewise decoration has been a crucial and recurring category in the work of Buren, the notorious vertical stripes serving as mere ornaments not only on walls, stairways, and pedestals but also on flags, billboards, and the canvases of sailing boats, consciously leaving the artwork with no other function than "cultural embellishment" and turning the artist into a "deliberate decorator of the status quo," as Buchloh has argued.[26] Despite the overriding asceticism of his practice, Asher, too, exposed decoration as the final destiny of formalist art, such as when he relocated the aluminum wall claddings of the exterior facade into an interior gallery space at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 1979 and thereby revealed Minimalist sculpture's reliance on the supposed neutrality of its architectural container as part of his much-discussed project.[27]

Knight's *Museotypes* and *Autotypes* identify this historical condition of abstraction as well. However, they do so by accentuating the preconditions and effects of contemporary discourse networks rather than identifiable institutions—or, in Foucauldian terminology, discrete "sites of enclosure"—which transform artistic production and the institutional spaces of its display exactly by making it part of their expansion, as Deleuze has keenly observed: "Even art has left the spaces of enclosure in order to enter into the open circuits of the bank."[28] Following the demise of the factory regime and the rise of finance capitalism in the early 1970s, "[m]arketing has become the center . . . of the corporation."[29] Predicated on this insight, Knight's project polemically redefines a museum's architecture as nothing more than an iconic logotype, thereby obliterating the distinction between public institutions and private business. But it would be short-sighted to associate the trademark's general pervasiveness in the postwar period with a regime of power largely based on visibility, in which "[a]ll that once was directly lived has become mere representation," to quote Guy Debord's definition of *The Society of the Spectacle*.[30] On the contrary, it signals a whole different

constellation of technologies and economic processes whose operations remain structurally hidden from view not because they would be supplanted by the aura of "images of possessible objects," but because these increasingly were displaced by "digitized flows of data," as Jonathan Crary already remarked in the early 1980s.[31]

In terms of the pertinence of abstraction in control societies, Knight's *Museotypes* are closely related to his *Project for documenta 7* in 1982, today commonly referred to as *Logotypes*. Installed on each of the four landings of the two main staircases in the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel, Germany, the first art museum on the European continent, Knight's project consisted of eight identically sized typographical reliefs that transfigured his initials into a trademark design. Each of the wooden pieces was almost entirely wrapped in publicity posters for tourist destinations such as Vienna and Versailles, and for a bank in California. Employed as decorative devices at the margins of the exhibition's main course, Knight's contribution to documenta 7 not only commented on the then-rampant restorative notions of authorship but also posited the art object *tout court* within the operation of markets that, according to Deleuze, is now "the instrument of social control."[32] Knight did not exclude his position as an artist from this political condition, but rather performed a "self-reflective mode of critique" by displaying his own artistic identity as a brand's logotype.[33] His signature only fulfills the function as a support for advertising leisure activities. In this sense, the *Logotypes* already identified the museum space and the rhetoric of autonomy traditionally surrounding it—in the form of the curator Rudi Fuchs's romanticist "Letter to an Artist,"[34] which was infamous at the time—as one site within an increasingly globalized apparatus of cultural tourism and city marketing.[35] In this vein Knight's contribution to a show with Asher and Buren in Marseille in 1988, for which the exhibition space had been turned into a quintessentially French café by the latter, identified the site of Galerie Roger Palhais solely with its location in the shopping area of a tourist destination.[36] The artist produced a lithographic print in an edition of only one copy, in the guise of a travel poster, entitled *Marque Déposée* that depicted the *cour* in front of the gallery. The oversized red lettering *MARSEILLE*—with the logotype of the artist's initials here serving as a literal trademark sign—superimposed any other information that could possibly be derived from the image. Additional travel posters as well as *affiches* announcing theater plays,

films, and concerts from the neighboring café that also had provided Buren with the furniture for his installation soon graced the gallery wall as accouterments and literally engulfed *Marque Déposée*. Though specifically related to the gallery as a physical place, Knight's work at the same time ironically recoded the artwork as a publicity ploy adhering to no particular institutional site.

The project Knight conceived and implemented on the occasion of the Los Angeles Institute for Contemporary Art's tenth anniversary in 1984 had preceded this inquiry by explicitly experimenting with the notion of displacement. Art literally entered the bank. Blocking the access to the proper gallery, Knight turned the entrance area of the alternative art institution into a corporate lobby with the help of waiting chairs, a waste bin, and foliage plants, as well as a large mural of a Western pioneer landscape appropriated from a publicity campaign for Wells Fargo Bank; the generic slogan "LAICA: When the Conversation Turns to Art" was printed both on that wall and all letterheads of the institution during the exhibition's duration. Moreover, several reliefs of the artist's initials were on display as faux corporate logotypes. Simultaneously, one of these monograms was installed at the Santa Monica branch office of Wells Fargo Bank, allocated especially to be decorated by art exhibitions. Knight's project thus deliberately inverted the original designation of both sites, as Alexander Alberro has perceptively argued:

> The role each institution usually plays was recontextualized and reversed—the alternative gallery was turned into a corporate office, and the corporate space into a gallery space—and the inherent viability of LAICA to funding organizations and corporate businesses like Wells Fargo was highlighted.[37]

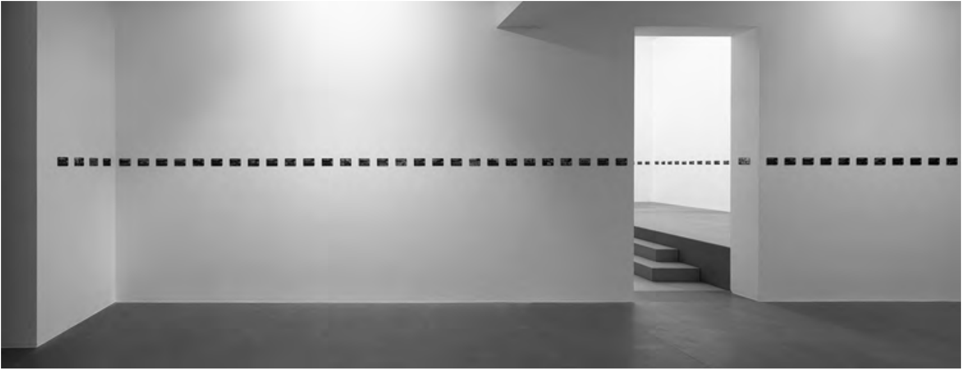
By doubling the exhibition site and through the reversal of functions and aesthetics, Knight's project moved beyond the cherished premise of institutional critique to expose the impact of supposedly philanthropist corporations and their financial support on the cultural sphere. If the "birth of the nonreferential aesthetic sign" in Modernism had converged with "the rise of the inconvertible token money" and the end of the gold standard, so that the artistic tendency of "severing the connection between a representation . . . and its referent in reality" emerging in the 1910s was "contemporary with an economic system

John Knight, *Marque Déposée,* 1988, installation view, Galerie Roger Pailhas, Marseille, France.

entirely regulated by the abstract legal apparatus of banking," as Rosalind Krauss has argued, Knight's methodology of site specificity would seem to emerge simultaneously with yet another turning point in the history of finance economy.[38] In 1973 the Bretton Woods system of monetary management, which had been established in 1944 at the Mount Washington Hotel in New Hampshire and included the founding of the IMF and today's World Bank to secure so-called free trade through a model of currency convertibility based on the exchange rate of the dollar to gold, was unilaterally terminated by the US government. As Joseph Vogl has argued, this moment marks the ultimate passage to finance capital, an economical *condition postmoderne* of an exorbitant regime of free-floating signifiers in which not only are stocks traded but also a "derivative revolution" occurs. Facilitated by computerization, profits from then on are increasingly based on "foreign exchange futures" and the buying and selling of unsecured credits and mortgages. The speculative capital market in turn serves as the model for all markets.[39] Asserting a structural homology between the fields of economy and the aesthetic, Knight's project for LAICA provides the recognition that once art has entered the open circuits of the bank, it cannot but critically account for the forces that sever it from the so-far privileged institutional venues of its representation.[40]

Knight emblematized this crucial insight in his work *Worldebt,* which he first conceived in 1994. Consisting of one hundred sixty-five slightly oversized credit cards onto which images from those countries that were in debt due to the unequal distribution of wealth fueling the current geopolitical system and the administered economic world order had been printed alongside information regarding the dates they became members of the IMF and a phone number for further inquiries, the work on the one hand leveled a political critique at the institution that at the time indulged in the celebration of its fiftieth anniversary.[41] One the other hand, the *Worldebt* project—whose exhibition at Richard Telles Fine Art in Los Angeles in 2009 was announced by an invitation card showing the site of the Mount Washington Hotel—self-reflexively defined the art object as an abstract token of unsecured value, both unanchored and brought into existence by the apparatus of banking.

Upon being invited to documenta 7 by Fuchs, Knight initially proposed three possible projects, one of which bears particularly close conceptual similarities to the *Museotypes* and metonymically links the logic



John Knight, *Worldebt,* 1994, installation view, Galerie Xavier Hufkens, Brussels, Belgium, 2008. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Xavier Hufkens, Brussels. Photo: Allard Bovenberg.

John Knight, *Worldebt*, 1994, invitation card, Richard Telles Fine Art, Los Angeles, 2009.

of the logotype directly to the museum as architectural container. In his letter to the curator, Knight suggested creating a floor directory that would be "made-up of five cast bronze plaques, designed in an outline-type form. The work will begin on the first floor with what would appear to be a standard floor plan type guide . . . , and become more-and-more stylized as it ascends floor-to-floor, until it ends with an overtly abstracted form diagram on the top floor. This work was originally planned for the Fredericianum [sic] Museum, but . . . could be installed elsewhere if necessary. . . ."[42] The specific site of the museum in this unrealized project is dispersed into gradually abstracted modes of representation until it appears as a diagram charting spatial relations rather than the given building's tectonics. In Deleuzian terms, the museum in control societies is no longer conceived as a form, as it still was under the condition of discipline, but as a modulation, "like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point."[43] In this regard, Knight's proposal extends the process of abstracting the ground floor of an interior as he had conceived it in a 1977 contribution to an issue of the *LAICA Journal* that was guest edited by Morgan Fisher and devoted to the relation between artists and film, from a domestic to an institutional space.[44] Just as the floor plan of a fictitious couple's home in Knight's *Untitled (The Don and Maureen Campbell Diagram to Be Applied in Any Metaphoric Manner They Wish)* is—following the opening credits—successively transfigured over the spread of three of the four pages allotted to each participating artist by the graphic rendering of a camera's movements as a film of the private environment is produced, the public space of the museum, too, is subjected to the contemporary *Aufschreibe-system*. As Dan Graham has clairvoyantly noted vis-à-vis the representation of architecture implicit in Knight's famous *Journals Series:*

> Architecture influenced by its potential reproducibility seems to shift interchangeably between two- and three-dimensionality. Such architecture [. . .] foregrounds the idea that any architectonic, three-dimensional form can be (hypothetically) constructed from an arbitrary logic, such as that used in computer-generated, "hyperspace" video graphics.[45]

In Memory of the Museum

Whereas Broodthaers, in his fictitious *Musée d' Art Moderne, Départment des Aigles, Section des Figures* from 1972 departed from the premise of an identity between the eagle as an idea and the conceptualist tautology of "art as idea," and therefore presented this heraldic motif in its migration from fossils to paintings, comic strips and product logos,[46] in Knight's proposal, as well as later in the *Museotypes,* the architecture of the museum itself evolves into a logotype meant for incessant circulation in the discourses, media, and conduits that determine a given culture at its material core. Related to such a radically changed status of the museum, Branden Joseph has argued,

> In place of a succession of discrete objects within an historical enfilade, the contemporary art museum—which produces ever more fleeting and dissociated experiences of visual effects and mobilized affects—functions as only a temporary node within a global network of artistic circulation. . . .[47]

This diagnosis, as it virtually stands at the outset of both Knight's *Museotypes* and *Autotypes,* obviously has ramifications for the museum's traditional mnemonic function as the archive of the historical records of a given culture's aesthetic achievements. It is crucial in this respect that Knight has chosen commemorative plates as the medium for his reflection of the institution's state of transition. If it was once the museum's official task to address, store, and process the most relevant data, in light of Knight's project it would seem that exactly this formerly uncontested mediatory power needs to be remembered, albeit reduced to the abstract shape of a logotype, and made tangible through the ostensibly obsolete medium of a decorative bone china plate. The contemporary museum cannot but appear as a mere node in a network whose discourses and techniques once brought it into existence, but that under the current regime of control and regulation by far exceeds the possibilities of storage, the modes of experience, perception, and communication of any art institution.

The circuits of electronic and digital media, whose technical capabilities have doubled approximately every two years over the last five decades, "mock any exhibition," as Kittler asserted in his 1996 essay "Museums on the Digital Frontier":

> Like the arts, with whose autonomy the modern museum began, the latter itself seems to be limited by things that, being controlled by the five senses, are therefore "handiwork." Anything that "catches the eye" or is "within reach" [. . .] can be "museumized," thereby turning into the availability of an exhibition item. On the other hand, true high-tech is what functions only under the condition that it deceives the bandwidth of the senses. Architectural grandeur may once have been the art of kings, and museum exhibitions the triumphant march of colonial empires; today, however, the empires that be derive their strength from miniaturization and imperceptibility, which still appear to have no bounds.[48]

The computer-generated curves of some of the recent museum extensions as they appear in Knight's *Autotypes* attest to this regime of power and its digital media technologies, whose algorithms by definition operate below the threshold of our senses. So despite all claims for grandeur, the ground plans Knight has accumulated in his series result from standardized, if not automated, design solutions more than from the supposedly ingenious architectural vision commonly marketed in an institution's attempt to attract visitors, tourists, and media attention. By erecting spectacular new buildings, the museum simply follows the current trends of cultural tourism, and thereby it cannot but reinforce its ultimately decentralized position as only one among innumerable other travel destinations. The fact that the artist would only give the names of the cities in which the museum's expansions are located rather than that of the given institution only stresses this predicament. With the decision to leave the walls of the main space of Greene Naftali gallery empty except for a solitary vitrine and the overscaled *AUTOTYPES* sign that depicted the site for the Whitney Museum's new building in the nearby Meatpacking district, Knight's exhibition again ironically evoked the space of the corporate lobby and operated in and ex situ at once.[49]

It is the major achievement of Knight's *Museotypes* and *Autotypes* to make the repercussions of these developments palpable in defense of the museum's former functions, without succumbing to the illusion that they will ever be restored. However, as Knight's practice continues to demonstrate, although itself transmuting from one node to another, the museum still can be, if only tactically, reclaimed as a site of critical intervention by exposing it to its very own claims of permanence, local

John Knight, *Autotypes,* 2011, detail.

embeddedness, and ownership—exactly with recourse to a notion of site specificity based on material and physical inscription techniques that have long been unrooted by the ruling machinations of discourse networks. When invited to participate in a group show called *The Artist's Museum* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 2010, Knight's response was to have this title and date carved into a cornerstone of the institution's existing architecture. As Knight's notes in his initial proposal for his *The Artist's Museum, MMX,* a work in situ, the work deliberately combines a "sign of civic recuperation" with "a nod to restorative aesthetics."[50] Literally written in stone, Knight's work is permanently attached to the architecture of an institution that itself is only "a temporary node within a global network of artistic circulation." Despite appearances, this project too can only exist in situ because it accounts for the museum as modulation.

Notes

1. Craig Owens, "From Work to Frame, or, Is There Life after 'The Death of the Author'? [1985]," in Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, And Culture*, eds. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock, introduction by Simon Watney (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 126.

2. Ibid.

3. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *30/40. A Selection of Forty Artists from Thirty Years at Marian Goodman Gallery* (New York: Marian Goodman Gallery, 2007), 188.

4. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Isabelle Graw, "Who's Afraid of JK? An Interview with John Knight [2005]," in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings,* eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 397. Reprinted in this volume.

5. See Kirsi Peltomäki, *Situation Aesthetics: The Work of Michael Asher* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 12; Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture," in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 1–39. Rosalind E. Krauss has characterized Asher's interventions of the early 1970s as "Minimalism by other means." Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 540.

6. In this regard Knight's work is situated in the larger field of practices that since the mid-1960s sought to redefine the object of art and its context by recourse to information media (or systems theory) as a heuristic model, that is, without being expressively associated with technology. See Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 68.

7. Branden W. Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage: A Minor History* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 51. Joseph transposes Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of Kafka's onto the terrain of Minimalism in the 1960s. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

8. Marie-Ange Brayer, "Interview with John Knight," *Artefactum* 9, no. 42 (February–March 1992): 17. Reprinted in this volume.

9. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 105–143.

10. Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3–7.

11. For an account of parallel lines of developments in the 1960s regarding the increasingly dispersed sites of industrial labor, scientific research, and artistic production see Peter Galison and Caroline A. Jones, "Factory, Laboratory, Studio: Dispersing the Site of Production," in *The Architecture of Science*, ed. Peter Galison and Emily Thompson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 497–540.

12. See Sabeth Buchmann, *Denken gegen das Denken: Produktion, Technologie, Subjektivität bei Sol LeWitt, Yvonne Rainer und Hélio Oiticica* (Berlin: b_books, 2007), 44; Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 2–3.

13. Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900,* trans. Michael Mettler with Chris Cullens, foreword by David E. Wellbery (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 69. The term *Aufschreibesystem,* as used for the original German title of the 1985 book by Kittler, was coined by Daniel Paul Schreber in his *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903), which played an instrumental role in the formation of Freud's theory of paranoia. By the term, *Aufschreibesystem,* Schreber sought to imply that everything he did and said was "written-down" and immediately recorded as data. Ultimately, it seems untranslatable into English. As for the formation of Kittler's media theory see John Armitage, "From Discourse Networks to Cultural Mathematics: An Interview with Friedrich A. Kittler," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 7–8 (2006): 17–38.

14. One of the main differences between the concepts of "control societies" and "discourse networks," however, concerns the status of media and technology; whereas Kittler's approach that covers the modern period since 1800 and is indebted to Claude Shannon's mathematical theory of information ultimately relies on the idea of a precedence of machines for all phenomena in a given culture, Deleuze's explicitly states that these are not determining, but "express those social forms capable of generating and using them" (Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," 6). In his account of late twentieth-century developments, Deleuze can therefore also take economical shifts resulting from the demise of the factory regime into account that necessarily go unmentioned in a Kittlerian perspective, yet are equally crucial for an understanding of Post-Conceptual art.

15. See Rosalind E. Krauss, *A Voyage on the North See: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999).

16. See André Rottmann, "Networks, Techniques, Institutions: Art History in Open Circuits," *Texte zur Kunst* 81 (March 2011): 142–144.

17. In this respect, Knight's methodology fundamentally differs from practices emerging in the early 1990s that in the words of James Meyer would address a given location "as a network of sites referring to an *elsewhere*" with recourse to notions of archeology or allegory and explicate its use through textual documents, photographic records, and the performative integration of the artist's body. James Meyer, "The Functional Site," *Platzwechsel: Ursula Biemann, Tom Burr, Mark Dion, Christian Philipp Müller*, exhibition catalog (Zurich: Kunsthalle Zürich, 1995), 35.

18. See Douglas Crimp, "This Is Not a Museum of Art," in Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins, with photographs by Louise Lawler* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 226.

19. Anne Rorimer, "On John Knight," in *John Knight*, exhibition catalog (Chicago: The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1983), n.p. Reprinted in this volume.

20. Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," 6.

21. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Knight's Negations," in *John Knight: 87°,* exhibition catalog (Mountainville, NY: Storm King Art Center, 2001), 9. Reprinted in this volume.

22. Sven Lütticken, *The Idols of the Market: Modern Iconoclasm and the Fundamentalist Spectacle* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009), 139. In this respect Jonathan Crary's caution against art-historical narratives that regard the "alleged perceptual revolution of advanced art" as occurring at the margins of a dominant field of vision determined by the realist media of film and photography and in dialectical opposition to scientific and popular culture rather than seeing both as "phenomena as overlapping components of a single social surface" seems as crucial as pertinent. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 4–5.

23. Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," 6.

24. Lütticken, *The Idols of the Market,* 140.

25. Owens, "From Work to Frame . . . ," 128; also see Rachel Haidu, *The Absence of Work: Marcel Broodthaers, 1964–1976* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 265–267.

26. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Daniel Buren's *Les Couleurs/Les Formes* [1981]," in Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry,* 137.

27. See Miwon Kwon, "Support and Decoration: Michael Asher's Critique of the Architecture of Display," in *Michael Asher*, exhibition catalog, ed. Elsa Longhauser (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2008), n.p.

28. Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," 6.

29. Ibid.

30. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 12.

31. Jonathan Crary, "Eclipse of the Spectacle," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 287. Taking a lead from Baudrillard's writings, Lütticken argues that "the interplay of quasi-symbolic logotypes and brands result in a system of pure difference—which is to say: of equivalence—meaning that capital abstracts itself *beyond the visual*. The medium of abstraction is digital; it is the binary *logos* of pure difference, of 0/1, of yes/no." Lütticken, *The Idols of the Market,* 127. For a related discussion of similarities between the syntax of Minimalism and corporate logotypes design see *Objects and Logotypes: Relationships between Minimalist Art and Corporate Design,* exhibition catalog, ed. Buzz Spector (Chicago: The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1980).

32. Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," 6.

33. John Knight in public conversation with the author, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, May 31, 2010. Thanks are due to Sabeth Buchmann and Sabine Breitwieser for making this event possible.

34. "'Kunst ist doch kein Spektakel'—Rudi Fuchs, Planer der Kasseler documenta 7, über Präsentation und Wahrnehmung heutiger Kunst," *Frankfurter Rundschau* (October 9, 1981): 10–11. The English version of the letter, sent to Knight along the invitation to participate in the exhibition in October 1981, is stored at the documenta Archiv Kassel, d7, file 27.

35. This aspect was further emphasized in Knight's exhibition *Wunderbares Deutschland* later that year at Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle in Munich, which consisted of *Logotypes* wrapped in German, or more specifically Bavarian, travel posters.

36. Buren's installation had the café adjacent to the gallery successively permeate the gallery space and did not function as a purely scenographic mise-en-scène but as an operative business with frequent customers over the course of the exhibition. Asher's contribution consisted of an LED sign installed in the gallery window continuously displaying telex headlines provided by the local newspaper *Le Provencal* on the drug traffic between North Africa and Marseille and a thematically related audio track diffused throughout the exhibition site by a loudspeaker attached to the back wall. See Patrick Javault, "Asher, Buren, Knight: Galerie Roger Pailhas," *Art Press,* no. 131 (December 1988): 72.

37. Alexander Alberro, "Meaning at the Margins: The Semiological Inversions of John Knight," in *John Knight: 87°,* exhibition catalog (Mountainville, NY: Storm King Art Center, 2001), 24. Reprinted in this volume.

38. Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Picasso Papers* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 6–7.

39. Joseph Vogl, *Das Gespenst des Kapitals* (Berlin/Zurich: diaphanes, 2010), 86–90.

40. For a more thorough discussion of the relation between finance capital and artistic production see Melanie Gilligan, "Derivative Days: Notes on Art, Finance and the Unproductive Forces," in *Texte zur Kunst* 69 (March 2008): 146–153; also see Isabelle Graw, *High Price: Art between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, trans. Nicholas Grindell (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009), 55–68.

41. "Man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt. It is true that capitalism has retained as a constant the extreme poverty of three quarters of humanity, too poor for debt, too numerous for confinement: control will not only have to deal with erosions of frontiers but with the explosions within shanty towns or ghettos." Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," 6–7. Given the affinities between control societies and discourse networks, it seems telling that Knight upon proposing *Worldebt* for documenta 11 in 2002 suggested that it be only streamed online instead of being exhibited on site in Kassel. Buchloh and Graw, "Who's Afraid of JK?," 401.

42. John Knight, "Letter [to Rudi Fuchs], November 1981," documenta Archiv Kassel, d7, file 75, n.p.

43. Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," 4.

44. John Knight, "*The Don and Maureen Campbell Diagram to Be Applied in Any Metaphoric Manner They Wish,*" *LAICA Journal*, no. 14 (April–May, 1977): 28–31; also see Anne Rorimer, "John Knight: Designating the Site," in *John Knight: Treize Travaux*, exhibition catalog (Villeurbanne: Le Nouveau Musée, 1989), 9–10. Reprinted in this volume.

45. Dan Graham, "On John Knight's Journals Work," *Journal: A Contemporary Art Magazine* 4, no. 40 (Fall 1984): 111. Reprinted in this volume. Knight's *Journals Series,* begun in 1977, consists of unsolicited subscriptions to lifestyle magazines the artist has sent to colleagues, critics, and collectors. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Knight's Moves: Situating the Art/Object," in *John Knight: MCMLXXXVI,* exhibition catalog (New York: Marian Goodman Gallery, 1986), 6–11. Reprinted in this volume.

46. Crimp, "This Is Not a Museum of Art," 220.

47. Branden W. Joseph, "Society of Control," *Texte zur Kunst* 66 (June 2007): 94.

48. Friedrich A. Kittler, "Museums on the Digital Frontier," in *The End(s) of the Museum*, ed. Manuel Borja-Villel, Thomas Keenan, and Alexander Garcia Düttmann (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1996), 76–77.

49. The announcements during Knight's exhibition that the Metropolitan Museum would take over the Whitney's building by Marcel Breuer on Madison Avenue and that the Museum of Modern Art would purchase the adjacent American Folk Art Museum made his work seem all the more prescient.

50. John Knight, "The Elusive Typology of Myth," proposal for MOCA, Los Angeles, 2010, n.p.

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