Gregory Battcock's "Quiticism" and the Queer Underground Press

Jennifer Sichel

> The anti-worker has to liberate himself from prevailing terminology, classifications and categorizations. In criticism (quiticism) only Jill Johnston and Gene Swenson have so far, been able to do it. In Journalism SCREW, NYRS., GOTHIC BLIMP WORKS, OTHER SCENES have done it.
>
> - Gregory Battcock, "The Last Estate," *New York Review of Sex*[1]

On June 1, 1969, *The New York Review of Sex (NYRS)*—a short lived, underground paper—published a long, rambling text by art critic Gregory Battcock titled "The Last Estate: Filth and Degregation" (sic) (Fig. 1) "This is a new column which will run as long as my interest in it lasts, or the paper gets busted," Battcock begins.

> The reason I'm doing it is because of several things, mainly because I was getting a lot of pressure on account of writing for this paper. [...] Things like *East Village Other, Rat, New York Free Press* aren't really anti-establishment papers, because they subscribe to major demands that the establishment insists upon. One of these demands is "morality," and along with it we find "truth," "reputation," "career," etc. Before this column gets too fucked up, these are the points I will stick to:
>
> 1. New York Review of Sex
> 2. Morality and Herbert Marcuse
> 3. Jill Johnston, modern criticism, and miscellaneous notes.[2]

When the *NYRS* folded at the end of 1969, Battcock moved "The Last Estate" to the new post-Stonewall paper *Gay*, where he published the column through 1974. In 1975, Battcock began writing for a new underground paper, *SoHo Weekly News*, and in 1977 he published his own

[1] Gregory Battcock, "The Last Estate," *New York Review of Sex,* July 1, 1969, 16.

[2] Ibid., 17.

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THE LAST ESTATE: Filth and Degregation

By Gregory Battcock

This is a new column which will run as long as my interest in it lasts, or the paper gets busted. The reason I'm doing it is because of several things, mainly because I was getting a lot of pressure on account of writing for this paper. You can say anti-establishment things in an establishment paper, or at least a paper that the establishment can accept. You can't write anti-establishment things in a paper the establishment doesn't like, because. Things like *East Village Other, Rat, New York Free Press,* aren't really anti-establishment papers, because they subscribe to major demands that the establishment insists upon.

One of these demands is "morality," and along with it we find "truth," "reputation," "career," etc. Before this column gets too fucked up, these are the points I will stick to:

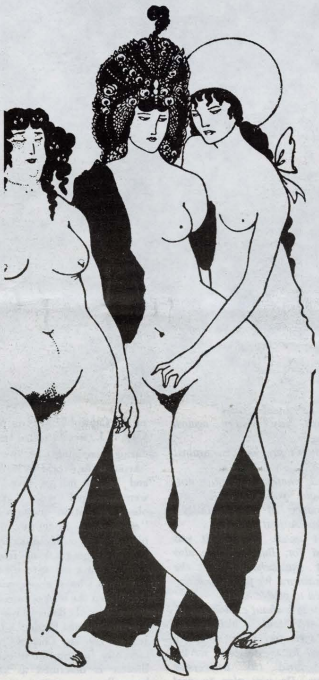
1. New York Review of Sex
2. Morality and Herbert Marcuse
3. Jill Johnston, modern criticism, and miscellaneous notes.

No use harping on McLuhan again, but it's true that you can get the same kind of information from two different media, and it comes out different with each. I really think that when I explain a view in this paper it comes out more objectionable than it does when it appears in *Arts,* for example. Here's another example. Notice the tremendous difference in watching a movie on T.V., and watching it in public. Besides the usual differences like when you're watching T.V. you can take your clothes off, or get high or drunk, or lay on the floor, and the picture is smaller, and there are countless interruptions that contribute toward a sensibility that ultimately will find fragmentation a way of life, it's about time, but there are even greater differences. The main difference between watching television (at home) and cinema(out) has to do with private and public.

Recently I screened a whole bunch of filmed T.V. commercials in a movie auditorium to a group of people who were expecting to see a movie. Everybody screamed yelled, and laughed. When we see these same commercials on the telly at home we may register disgust and perhaps even smile, but we rarely respond more actively. Well, why do the commercials provoke agitated response when viewed in public, that is quite different from the response provoked when they are watched at home, where THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO BE WATCHED?

That's the clue. They were designed for *private* viewing and, in public, they appear, quite naturally, to be awkward, and mostly, to cause embarrassment. These 30 and 60 second films were not meant to be seen in public with strangers, and therefore their obscenity and stupidity are suddenly exposed. I think there may be a parallel between the television-movie house problem and the NYRS, SCREW, PLEASURE, OTHER, RAT problem but I'm not sure what it is. Probably much of the stuff printed in the NYRS type paper was either not originally intended for mass distribution or public press type publication and we haven't yet developed the new, receptive conditions in order to receive them properly, just as we hadn't been prepared to accept the VOICE ten years ago.

It seems that the new "sex underground" papers have provoked considerable hostility from the "kept intellectuals," the "assistant professors" that students should start doing something about, forget about the cops and up-tight newsdealers. In general, they (the newspapers) have been found "tasteless" and "obscene." Well, taste is something that is too big to get into; let's just say it's in the mouth and forget it. (In America you wonder where taste is, it can't be in the mouth because the food is always so awful and nobody cares, and America was the first to invent iceberg lettuce.) They think it "bourgeois " to care. So the paper is obscene. Well, let's hope so. Herbert Marcuse tells us that: "Obscenity is a moral concept in the verbal arsenal of the Establishment...", great, let them call it obscene, they better. Marcuse has a lot more to say about "obscenity," like "Obscene is not the picture of a naked woman who exposes her pubic hair but that of a fully clad general who exposes his medals rewarded in a war of aggression" and years ago Susan Sontag reminded us that it wasn't the girly show advertisements on 42nd St. that were obscene, but the war pictures that do even better business.



It is almost obligatory now-a-days, to be obscene according to the capitalist definition of obscenity. In fact, as Marcuse says, "This society is obscene in producing and indecently exposing a stifling abundance of wares while depriving its victims abroad of the necessities of life; obscene in the words and smiles of its politicians and entertainers; in its prayers, in its ignorance, and in the wisdom of its KEPT INTELLECTUALS."

Marcuse isn't saying anything new. He admits that: "The coincidence between some of (my) ideas and those formulated by the young militants was to me striking." He's not referring to the NYRS in the next quotation, but is certainly had in mind the "kept" types who find the paper so questionable: "Linguistic therapy—that is, the effort to free words (and thereby concepts) from the all but total distortion of their meanings by the Establishment—demands the transfer of moral standards (and of their validation) from the Establishment to the revolt against it."

Most people I know tell me to stop writing for the NYRS. Some say my pieces are awful. Others say the paper is awful. What they all mean is that something is happening and they don't know what it is. Well, O.K.

You can know a person from the paper he writes for. Since I write for NYRS it means I'm sexy. Since I write for *Arts* it means I'm arty. Since I write for the *College Art Journal,* it means I'm intellectual (boring). Put them all together and it means I'm rich, since you have to be when you write for "little" magazines that don't have much bread. The magazines I'd really like to write for, but they'll never ask me, are: *Gourmet,* (because it's so bad and it could be so good), and some others I can't think of now. What someone has to do is get out of all these identifications and categories but only Jill Johnston so far as I know, has really been able to do it. Its very hard. Nobody wants you to do it. They get concerned and tell you you're self-destructive and they think you're old Beethovan practicing away when, in reality, you should be out doing something with it.

Jill can do it because she's smart and has learned to stop listening to what people say. Her work, which I think is criticism, doesn't fit into any existent definition of criticism and that's what makes it the best criticism around today. There are some other good people around also, but ya know, I can't mention their names because they have either told me not to, or probably would get up tight so I'm not mentioning any names anymore of people I know, except Jill, and maybe Marcuse. What this here column is about is the last estate which I'll have to ask my father what that is because he's a real estate broker and will know. (De Gaulle got rid of the real estate brokers in France). It just dawned on me that this was supposed to be a review of *Portnoy's Complaint,* so I'll just have another glass of wine and forget it. Next week will be a review of *Portnoy's Criticisms, since that's maybe what it is. Who complains anymore, like only the Pope. (I know, that's not* what the title means. Mea Culpa). We're all critics, like we used to be all artists until that got pointless. There were too many. Anyway, don't make fun of the Church, only the Museum of Modern Art, since god isn't on their side. Oh, but CBS is! Almost forgot.

Saw *Lonesome Cowboy*, really great. The best movie I've seen since *Chelsea Girls.* The New Left doesn't like Warhol. Great. Nothing's a question of like or don't like anymore. Warhol is more New Left than any other filmmaker. So why don't I write about why I think Warhol's *Lonesome Cowboy* is the greatest movie (to date) of all time? Except what might be just as good is the, Surfing Movie which I saw work prints of,—if this was a weekly column I could write about both, so the NYRS should lower the price and come out every week.

*Degradation

1. Gregory Battcock, "The Last Estate: Filth and Degregation," *New York Review of Sex & Politics*, June 1, 1969, p. 17. Collection of Jennifer Sichel (scan courtesy of author).

small, staple-bound newsprint zine titled *Trylon & Perisphere*, which ceased publication in 1978 after just three issues. During the same years, Battcock regularly published art criticism in *Arts Magazine*, where he served as editor-in-chief from 1973 to 1975. He also wrote for the London-based magazine *Art and Artists* and the Milan-based *Domus*. He was a founding member of the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC) in 1969. Julia Bryan-Wilson describes Battcock as "a perpetually confrontational voice in this time period" and characterizes his role within the AWC as being marked by a kind of slapdash pragmatism—a willingness to fudge the edges of theory to justify, for example, those "artists in the AWC" who "wanted their art to be political without having to compromise its nonrepresentational, esoteric form."[3] Bryan-Wilson explains that

> Minimalists did not have a thinker like Clement Greenberg to defend their art's estrangement or autonomy from popular culture as a critical, even political task or to demonstrate that such autonomy rested on the question of radical form. The minimalists of the AWC did have Herbert Marcuse, however. Or, to be more precise, they had a set of critics who appropriated Marcuse's theories to justify the relevance of minimal art. Gregory Battcock was at the center of this appropriation, although in practice it often meant creatively misinterpreting Marcuse himself.[4]

In addition, Battcock edited ten widely-read anthologies of modern art criticism for publisher E.P. Dutton and Co., including, most famously, his *Minimal Art* anthology of 1968 (Fig. 2). Art historian David Joselit recalls that "I, like many of my generation, learned the history of postwar art by reading Battcock's collections in college."[5] Battcock was murdered on December 26, 1980. He was found stabbed to death on a balcony in San Juan, Puerto Rico—which most of New York City found out about by way of a *SoHo Weekly News* cover story with lurid details about gay porn, dildos, and lube scattered about the apartment, all under the sensationalizing tabloid headline: "Blood of a Critic: Gregory Battcock's Rise to Stardom and Fall from Grace."[6]

Taking stock of this storied career, Joselit lauds Battcock's "intellectual promiscuity"—his "consistent effort to broaden the circulation or distribution of information in and around art."[7] According to Joselit, Battcock's greatest achievement was the prescient role he played in heralding "a shift in values from objects (as reservoirs of artistic intention and semiotic complexity) to situations (characterized by ephemeral, and often flamboyant, open-ended

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[3] Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 150.

[4] Ibid., 62.

[5] David Joselit, "Transformer: Gregory Battcock," *Artforum International*, vol. 51, no. 1 (September 2012), 507.

[6] David Weinberg, "Blood of a Critic: Gregory Battcock's Rise to Stardom and Fall from Grace," *Soho News*, vol. 9, no. 1 (October 7–13, 1981), 12–16.

[7] Joselit, "Transformer: Gregory Battcock," 507.

2. A selection of anthologies edited by Gregory Battcock, published by E.P. Dutton and Co. Collection of Jennifer Sichel (photo courtesy of author).

communication). [...] Art objects now perform similarly," Joselit writes: "they are temporary halts or arrested conjunctions of information flows. Such is the real legacy of Conceptual art." He concludes that "Battcock not only knew this—he acted on it."[8]

On the other side of the scholarly spectrum, Anne M. Wagner describes Battcock as "a minor man of letters and art world weathervane"—furnishing a not-so-flattering caveat as she cites Battcock's criticism.[9] According to Wagner, Battcock's greatest achievements happened in spite, not because, of his best efforts. "He worked too quickly, without hindsight," Wagner writes in an introduction to Battcock's *Minimal Art* anthology, reissued in 1995. "[S]ome of the significance of Battcock's anthologies lies precisely in the lack of great significance of at least some of their contents [...] these volumes have as much the flavor of archives as they do anthologies." And although Wagner describes the result as "singularly fortunate for the student of this period of American art," this is due to Battcock's distinct lack of editorial

[8] Ibid., 511.

[9] Anne M. Wagner, *A House Divided: American Art Since 1955* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 29.

astuteness: "a Battcock (characteristically) scrambling to meet a publisher's deadline," as she describes him.[10]

It seems to me that Wagner's dismissal and Joselit's rehabilitation of Battcock are both overstated. Neither a heroic herald nor a mere "minor man of letters," Battcock was instead a complicated figure who got some things right and other things deeply wrong, and who embarked on a fascinating, if fraught, project to reinvent art and criticism in pursuit of revolutionary change. Battcock's vision for art and criticism was radically sex positive, affirmatively gay, ephemeral, and open-ended, but it was also racist, sexist, catty, and often totally frivolous.

Battcock's key conviction was that the new underground sex papers represent the best hope for a genuine antiestablishment Marcusian "anti-art." These papers proliferated in the late sixties, with publishers capitalizing on increasing demand for queer sex classifieds and technological advancements in offset printing.[11] In 1969, Battcock began heralding the importance of offset printing in the underground press, convinced it would make possible whole new forms of art and criticism. In an essay on artist Les Levine's short-lived offset paper *Culture Hero: A Fanzine of Stars of the Superworld*, he posits that

> Levine, and to a lesser extent editors Sam Edwards (*New York Review of Sex*), Jeffery Shero (*RAT*), Jim Buckley (*Screw*), and Andy Warhol (*Interview*) exploited the unique and flexible graphic maneuvering that the offset press and the IBM typesetting machinery made possible. Thus a new *genre* was born, emphasizing fast, loose design and fast, loose editorial structure.[12]

According to Battcock, this new genre, with its openness to all sorts of perverse queer pleasures, engenders a new kind of criticism, which he calls "quiticism"—an ambiguous portmanteau combining "quit" and "criticism," but also, I argue, "queer" and "criticism." Battcock describes "quiticism" as a new form of artmaking that rejects conventions of authority, discipline, and judgement, and instead mobilizes language and embodied performance to imagine new queer generative ways of being in a world that isn't working. At his most sincere and generous moments, he describes how fellow critics Gene Swenson and (especially) Jill Johnston managed "to do it"—which is to say, managed to quit all the normative conventions

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[10] Anne M. Wagner, "Reading *Minimal Art*" in Gregory Battcock, ed. *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 5–8.

[11] The proliferation of underground sex papers was widely reported upon in the alternative press in 1969. For two key reports, see: Claudia Dreifus, "The Sex Newspapers: High Profit in Porn," *New York Scenes*, July 1969, 19–27, 62; and John Burks, "The Underground Press: A Special Report," *Rolling Stone*, October 4, 1969, 11–33.

[12] Gregory Battcock, "'Culture Hero': Truth and its Place in Journalism" in *Les Levine: Language ÷ Emotion + Syntax = Message*, catalogue published to accompany a Les Levine retrospective exhibition at The Vancouver Art Gallery, March 13–April 14, 1974. Emphasis in the original.

of criticism, and to produce instead extravagant queer forms that resist categorization and remain unacceptable to the establishment.[13]

However, at the same time, in Battcock's own hands, "quiticism" becomes something altogether less sincere, and more troubling. In response to his own shifting sense of whether a genuine Marcusian "anti-art" is possible, Battcock doubles down on negativity,[14] embracing full-on a "slavish devotion to a neo-capitalistic pleasure principle, a remarkable commitment to consumerism, undisguised racism and chauvinism," as he acknowledges bluntly (or perhaps sarcastically) in a 1972 "The Last Estate" column for *Gay*.[15] He levels his own critique in the guise of parodies and pretenses that offer much more in the way of nihilistic indulgence than rigorous criticism or sincere striving. And things didn't end well, for Battcock personally, of course, but also for his version of "quiticism." Tracing Battcock's writings in and out of art magazines, and through a succession of underground papers as each was founded, floundered, and folded—from the muckraking, short-lived *New York Free Press*, to the polymorphous '69-era *New York Review of Sex (NYRS)*, to the post-Stonewall *Gay*, to his own satirical zine *Trylon & Perisphere*—provides an index of the trouble. And it is trouble worth countenancing, as an opening to linger on fleeting moments replete with the creative energy of imagining new queer worlds, but also as an occasion to face the disappointment of failure—to grapple with a queer utopian project that devolves into travesty and tragedy without much of a redemptive arc.

Marcuse and Anti-Art (in two parts)

In the summer 1969 issue of *Arts Magazine*, Battcock published an article in the "Critique" section titled "Marcuse and Anti-Art," presenting his version of Marcuse's theories to the artworld, following on the heels of the publication of Marcuse's popular book *An Essay on Liberation*.[16] It is one of Battcock's most earnest pieces of writing. According to Battcock,

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[13] In my forthcoming book *Criticism without Authority: Gene Swenson's and Jill Johnston's Queer Practices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2025), I argue for the significance of Swenson and Johnston's "quiticism," or queer practices, as art. I trace how—through performances, protests, and on pages of underground newspapers—Swenson and Johnston reimagine sexuality, intimacy, and selfhood, and posit ways of being ambiguous and unmanageable in response to a world that tended to demand clarity and punish difference.

[14] I am grateful to Allan Doyle for his brilliant insights in thinking through the queer stakes of "doubling down on negativity," as part of our ongoing collaboration. See: Allan Doyle and Jennifer Sichel, "Mourning (and) Queer Theory: Pedagogy in a State of Emergency" (paper presented at the College Art Association 112th Annual Conference, Chicago, February 14, 2024), https://caa.confex.com/caa/2024/meetingapp.cgi/Paper/20887.

[15] Gregory Battcock, "The Last Estate," *Gay*, January 24, 1972. Clipping from Gregory Battcock papers, 1952-circa 1980. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[16] See: Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). Note that *An Essay on Liberation* includes many of the ideas Marcuse first presented in an artworld context in his 1967 essay "Art in the One-Dimensional Society." In fact, Marcuse begins *An Essay on Liberation* by

Marcuse labels as "anti-art" those works that "have been created within the modern culture that best conform to the requirements for total revolutionary change"—but, as Battcock points out, Marcuse does not explain what anti-art actually is or give examples of work that might fit the criteria.[17] Battcock then suggests that the films of Andy Warhol might be the only example "of an aesthetic provocation that is legitimately entitled to the 'anti-art' label that comes from within the art field." Warhol's films "do not accommodate themselves to the commercial structure and procedures for cinema in general," Battcock writes—they are "too boring, too ridiculous, just plain stupid [...] too 'outrageous' and 'indecent' [...] 'put ons' [that] require new artistic values that are not yet commonly understood."[18] Other than Warhol's films, Battcock explains that the real best hope for a genuine Marcusian anti-art will likely come from within the new, offset sex papers. "They differ from the traditional sex oriented tabloids in many ways," he explains.

> Their appeal is mainly to the "new sensibility" that views sexual matters as outside the sphere of morality and guilt. They do not accept the established definition of "obscenity" and their editors publicly subscribe to Marcuse's dictum that "Obscenity is a moral concept in the verbal arsenal of the establishment, which abuses the term by applying it, not to expressions of its own morality but to those of another." [...] Perversion and subversion, once taboo subjects for serious, practical speculation are now legitimate areas for moral investigation. [...] The newspapers referred to above are "anti-art" because they (or perhaps their principles) cannot be accommodated with the existent criteria for serious journalism. Indeed, they actively DISRUPT those criteria. Yet they are serious newspapers.[19]

Overall, "Marcuse and Anti-Art" conveys Battcock's romantic faith in the "awesome responsibility" Marcuse gives to artists—"the responsibility to structure the new sensibility"—and his hope that artists can rise to the occasion, thereby becoming "a relevant factor determining the direction of the revolution and the very environment of real freedom."[20] And Battcock sees the new pornzines—with their flexible design, loose editorial structure, antiestablishment ethos, and non-moralizing embrace of perverse queer sex—as the most promising site where such artistic experimentation can happen.

Battcock maintains this hope even after he quickly decides that, actually, "Marcuse is a total reactionary"—as his puts it in an interview with John Perrault for *Culture Hero* (Fig. 3), just a few months after "Marcuse and Anti-Art" came out. "It turned out I was completely wrong in my article," Battcock tells Perrault. "I took Marcuse's theories and I led them to their inevitable conclusions. [...] He knows nothing. He's just an... He has old-fashioned

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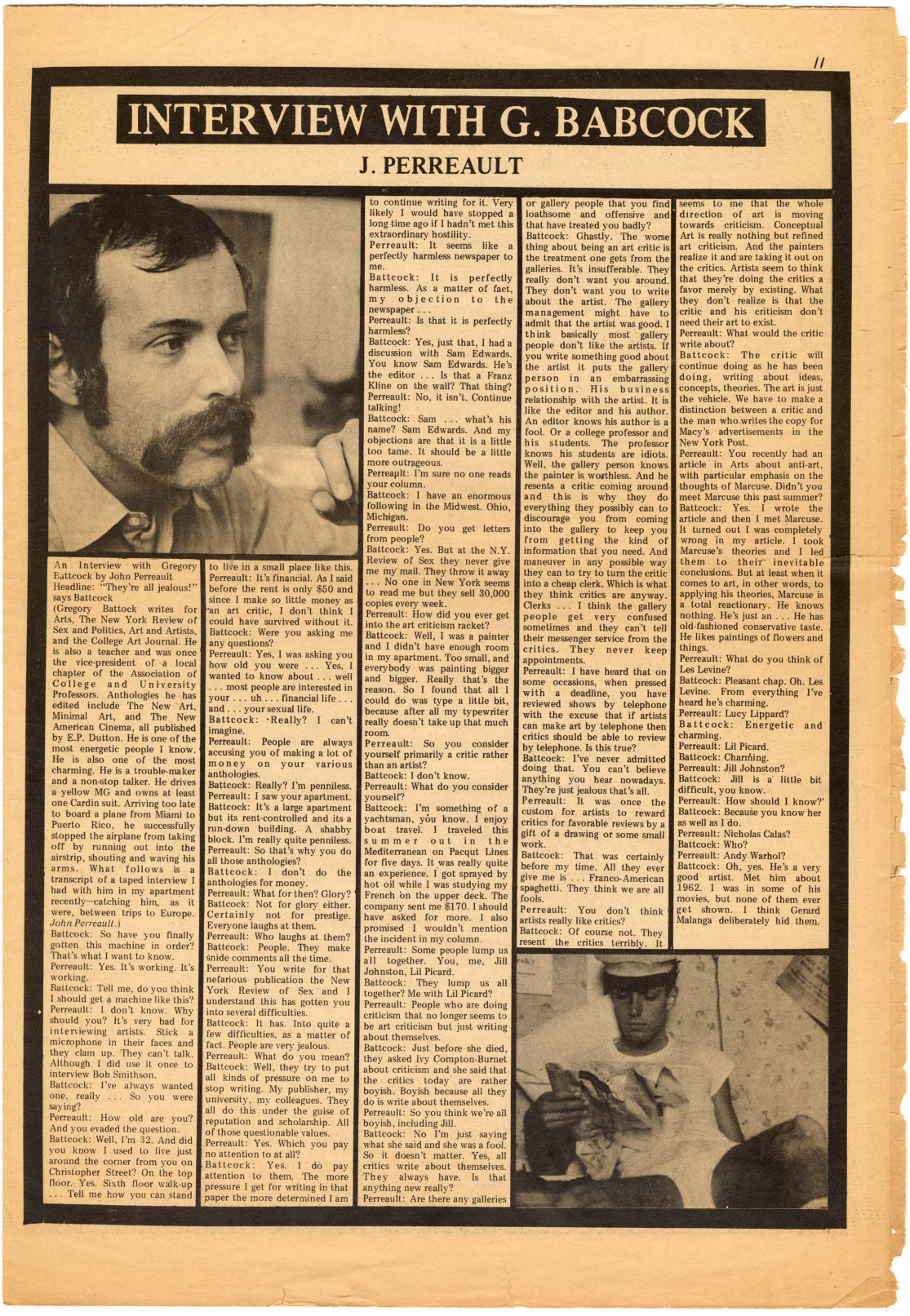
acknowledging its belatedness—noting that it is based on "lectures delivered in recent years" and "was written before the events of May and June 1968 in France."

[17] Gregory Battcock, "Marcuse and Anti-Art," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 43, no. 8 (summer 1969), 17–19.

[18] Ibid., 18.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 19.



INTERVIEW WITH G. BABCOCK

J. PERREAULT

An Interview with Gregory Battcock by John Perreault

Headline: "They're all jealous!" says Battcock

(Gregory Battock writes for Arts, The New York Review of Sex and Politics, Art and Artists, and the College Art Journal. He is also a teacher and was once the vice-president of a local chapter of the Association of College and University Professors. Anthologies he has edited include The New Art, Minimal Art, and The New American Cinema, all published by E.P. Dutton. He is one of the most energetic people I know. He is also one of the most charming. He is a trouble-maker and a non-stop talker. He drives a yellow MG and owns at least one Cardin suit. Arriving too late to board a plane from Miami to Puerto Rico, he successfully stopped the airplane from taking off by running out into the airstrip, shouting and waving his arms. What follows is a transcript of a taped interview I had with him in my apartment recently—catching him, as it were, between trips to Europe. *John Perreault.*)

Battcock: So have you finally gotten this machine in order? That's what I want to know.

Perreault: Yes. It's working. It's working.

Battcock: Tell me, do you think I should get a machine like this?

Perreault: I don't know. Why should you? It's very bad for interviewing artists. Stick a microphone in their faces and they clam up. They can't talk. Although I did use it once to interview Bob Smithson.

Battcock: I've always wanted one, really . . . So you were saying?

Perreault: How old are you? And you evaded the question.

Battcock: Well, I'm 32. And did you know I used to live just around the corner from you on Christopher Street? On the top floor. Yes. Sixth floor walk-up . . . Tell me how you can stand to live in a small place like this.

Perreault: It's financial. As I said before the rent is only $50 and since I make so little money as an art critic, I don't think I could have survived without it.

Battcock: Were you asking me any questions?

Perreault: Yes, I was asking you how old you were . . . Yes, I wanted to know about . . . well . . . most people are interested in your . . . uh . . . financial life . . . and . . . your sexual life.

Battcock: Really? I can't imagine.

Perreault: People are always accusing you of making a lot of money on your various anthologies.

Battcock: Really? I'm penniless.

Perreault: I saw your apartment.

Battcock: It's a large apartment but its rent-controlled and its a run-down building. A shabby block. I'm really quite penniless.

Perreault: So that's why you do all those anthologies?

Battcock: I don't do the anthologies for money.

Perreault: What for then? Glory?

Battcock: Not for glory either. Certainly not for prestige. Everyone laughs at them.

Perreault: Who laughs at them?

Battcock: People. They make snide comments all the time.

Perreault: You write for that nefarious publication the New York Review of Sex and I understand this has gotten you into several difficulties.

Battcock: It has. Into quite a few difficulties, as a matter of fact. People are very jealous.

Perreault: What do you mean?

Battcock: Well, they try to put all kinds of pressure on me to stop writing. My publisher, my university, my colleagues. They all do this under the guise of reputation and scholarship. All of those questionable values.

Perreault: Yes. Which you pay no attention to at all?

Battcock: Yes. I do pay attention to them. The more pressure I get for writing in that paper the more determined I am to continue writing for it. Very likely I would have stopped a long time ago if I hadn't met this extraordinary hostility.

Perreault: It seems like a perfectly harmless newspaper to me.

Battcock: It is perfectly harmless. As a matter of fact, my objection to the newspaper . . .

Perreault: Is that it is perfectly harmless?

Battcock: Yes, just that, I had a discussion with Sam Edwards. You know Sam Edwards. He's the editor . . . Is that a Franz Kline on the wall? That thing?

Perreault: No, it isn't. Continue talking!

Battcock: Sam . . . what's his name? Sam Edwards. And my objections are that it is a little too tame. It should be a little more outrageous.

Perreault: I'm sure no one reads your column.

Battcock: I have an enormous following in the Midwest. Ohio, Michigan.

Perreault: Do you get letters from people?

Battcock: Yes. But at the N.Y. Review of Sex they never give me my mail. They throw it away . . . No one in New York seems to read me but they sell 30,000 copies every week.

Perreault: How did you ever get into the art criticism racket?

Battcock: Well, I was a painter and I didn't have enough room in my apartment. Too small, and everybody was painting bigger and bigger. Really that's the reason. So I found that all I could do was type a little bit, because after all my typewriter really doesn't take up that much room.

Perreault: So you consider yourself primarily a critic rather than an artist?

Battcock: I don't know.

Perreault: What do you consider yourself?

Battcock: I'm something of a yachtsman, you know. I enjoy boat travel. I traveled this summer out in the Mediterranean on Pacqut Lines for five days. It was really quite an experience. I got sprayed by hot oil while I was studying my French on the upper deck. The company sent me $170. I should have asked for more. I also promised I wouldn't mention the incident in my column.

Perreault: Some people lump us all together. You, me, Jill Johnston, Lil Picard.

Battcock: They lump us all together? Me with Lil Picard?

Perreault: People who are doing criticism that no longer seems to be art criticism but just writing about themselves.

Battcock: Just before she died, they asked Ivy Compton-Burnet about criticism and she said that the critics today are rather boyish. Boyish because all they do is write about themselves.

Perreault: So you think we're all boyish, including Jill.

Battcock: No I'm just saying what she said and she was a fool. So it doesn't matter. Yes, all critics write about themselves. They always have. Is that anything new really?

Perreault: Are there any galleries or gallery people that you find loathsome and offensive and that have treated you badly?

Battcock: Ghastly. The worse thing about being an art critic is the treatment one gets from the galleries. It's insufferable. They really don't want you around. They don't want you to write about the artist. The gallery management might have to admit that the artist was good. I think basically most gallery people don't like the artists. If you write something good about the artist it puts the gallery person in an embarrassing position. His business relationship with the artist. It is like the editor and his author. An editor knows his author is a fool. Or a college professor and his students. The professor knows his students are idiots. Well, the gallery person knows the painter is worthless. And he resents a critic coming around and this is why they do everything they possibly can to discourage you from coming into the gallery to keep you from getting the kind of information that you need. And maneuver in any possible way they can to try to turn the critic into a cheap clerk. Which is what they think critics are anyway. Clerks . . . I think the gallery people get very confused sometimes and they can't tell their messenger service from the critics. They never keep appointments.

Perreault: I have heard that on some occasions, when pressed with a deadline, you have reviewed shows by telephone with the excuse that if artists can make art by telephone then critics should be able to review by telephone. Is this true?

Battcock: I've never admitted doing that. You can't believe anything you hear nowadays. They're just jealous that's all.

Perreault: It was once the custom for artists to reward critics for favorable reviews by a gift of a drawing or some small work.

Battcock: That was certainly before my time. All they ever give me is . . . Franco-American spaghetti. They think we are all fools.

Perreault: You don't think artists really like critics?

Battcock: Of course not. They resent the critics terribly. It seems to me that the whole direction of art is moving towards criticism. Conceptual Art is really nothing but refined art criticism. And the painters realize it and are taking it out on the critics. Artists seem to think that they're doing the critics a favor merely by existing. What they don't realize is that the critic and his criticism don't need their art to exist.

Perreault: What would the critic write about?

Battcock: The critic will continue doing as he has been doing, writing about ideas, concepts, theories. The art is just the vehicle. We have to make a distinction between a critic and the man who writes the copy for Macy's advertisements in the New York Post.

Perreault: You recently had an article in Arts about anti-art, with particular emphasis on the thoughts of Marcuse. Didn't you meet Marcuse this past summer?

Battcock: Yes. I wrote the article and then I met Marcuse. It turned out I was completely wrong in my article. I took Marcuse's theories and I led them to their inevitable conclusions. But at least when it comes to art, in other words, to applying his theories, Marcuse is a total reactionary. He knows nothing. He's just an . . . He has old-fashioned conservative taste. He likes paintings of flowers and things.

Perreault: What do you think of Les Levine?

Battcock: Pleasant chap. Oh. Les Levine. From everything I've heard he's charming.

Perreault: Lucy Lippard?

Battcock: Energetic and charming.

Perreault: Lil Picard.

Battcock: Charming.

Perreault: Jill Johnston?

Battcock: Jill is a little bit difficult, you know.

Perreault: How should I know?'

Battcock: Because you know her as well as I do.

Perreault: Nicholas Calas?

Battcock: Who?

Perreault: Andy Warhol?

Battcock: Oh, yes. He's a very good artist. Met him about 1962. I was in some of his movies, but none of them ever get shown. I think Gerard Malanga deliberately hid them.

3. "Interview with G. Babcock [sic.]," *Culture Hero*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1969), 11. Collection of Jennifer Sichel (scan courtesy of author).

conservative taste. He likes paintings of flowers and things."[21] Unperturbed by this revelation, Battcock simply proceeds to argue that Marcuse himself is wrong about the on-the-ground implications of his own theory. As a corrective to his first article, in November 1969 Battcock published a second *Arts Magazine* critique titled "Marcuse and Anti-Art II." In a surprisingly blunt change of heart, Battcock concludes,

> Marcuse's theories concerning the function of art in a pre-revolutionary society are considerably different than one might have expected [...] once they are understood, [they] must be challenged. They are certainly at odds with the artistic theories of the radical artists and critics of our time. In a third article I will attempt to defend Anti-Art, and try to demonstrate that it is a radical form and as such is required by our repressive social environment. I will compare some of Marcuse's theories with those radical artists and make predictions concerning the development of art in a repressive pre-revolutionary society.[22]

Battcock thus takes up the mantle of challenging Marcuse's conclusions. But at the same time, he remains dedicated to Marcuse's earlier notion that in order to become liberated from repressive, compulsive capitalist consumption, society must embrace Eros—or, non-(re)productive pleasure and play. As Marcuse explains in a 1966 "Political Preface" to his earlier 1955 book *Eros and Civilization*: "'Polymorphous sexuality' was the term which I used to indicate that the new direction of progress would depend completely on the opportunity to activate repressed or arrested *organic*, biological needs: to make the human body an instrument of pleasure rather than labor. [...] Today the fight for life, the fight for Eros, is the *political* fight."[23]

In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse famously advances a utopian vision for a regressive yet forward-looking polymorphous sexuality, as his own Freudian-Marxist solution to "a 'political' problem: the liberation of man from inhuman existential conditions."[24] "The play impulse is the vehicle of this liberation," Marcuse writes. "The impulse does not aim at playing 'with' something; rather it is the play of life itself, beyond want and external compulsion—the manifestation of an existence without fear and anxiety, and thus the manifestation of freedom itself."[25] In this transformation of work into non-(re)productive play, Marcuse envisions the emergence of a "genuinely humane civilization"—in which society manages to "undo the channeling of sexuality into monogamic reproduction and the taboo on perversions."[26] Marcuse explains,

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[21] Gregory Battcock and John Perrault, "Interview with G. Babcock [sic.]," *Culture Hero*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1969), 11.

[22] Gregory Battcock, "Marcuse and Anti-Art II," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 44, no. 2 (November 1969), 20–22.

[23] Herbert Marcuse, "Political Preface, 1966," *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966, originally published 1955), xxv. Emphasis in the original.

[24] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization,* 187.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 199.

> The organism in its entirety becomes the substratum of sexuality, while at the same time the instinct's objective is no longer absorbed by a specialized function—namely, that of bringing "one's own genitals into contact with those of someone of the opposite sex." Thus enlarged, the field and objective of the instinct becomes the life of the organism itself. This process almost naturally, by its inner logic, suggests the conceptual transformation of sexuality into Eros.[27]

In a May 1967 article for *Arts Magazine*, titled "Art in the One-Dimensional Society," Marcuse argues that *art* is key to this transformation of sexuality into a polymorphously perverse, pleasure-seeking Eros. According to Marcuse, art can resist the "the totalitarian character of our 'affluent society'" by becoming "consciously and methodically destructive, disorderly, negative, nonsense anti-art"—or, by completely negating the "established system" to bring about a new system "of needs and satisfactions in which the aggressive, repressive, and exploitative instincts are subjugated to the sensuous assuasive energy of the life instincts."[28] It is a treatise full of romantic language about art's power to liberate civilization from the totalitarian, "one-dimensional" character of the established capitalist system.[29] Light on prescriptions or specifics, it offers more in the way of aspirational paradigms and optimistic platitudes. According to Marcuse, art can "guide the construction of the new society" and herald "the emergence of new modes and goals of technical progress itself."[30] Who wouldn't want that?

However, by 1968, Marcuse was already pretty blunt in his public statements about the distinct unlikelihood of this happening. In a *New York Times* interview published October 27, 1968, in response to the question, "Do you believe in the possibility of revolution in the United States?" Marcuse replies: "Absolutely not. Not at all"[31]—demonstrating uninterest in, or indifference to, the burgeoning queer perversity and gay liberation very much on display in the underground press. As theorist Kevin Floyd explains: "Marcuse is ultimately more interested in utopian, speculative figures of perversion than he is in real perverts."[32] Floyd argues that within just "a decade of *Eros and Civilization*'s publication [...]

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[27] Ibid., 205. The quote is from Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1949), 25.

[28] Herbert Marcuse, "Art in the One-Dimensional Society," *Arts Magazine* 41 (May 1967): 26-31.

[29] For a different account focused on how nostalgia for Marcusian "Eros" motivates the artworld's "contemporary queer dream" for communion and commonality, see: Jonathan D. Katz, "Naked Politics: The Art of Eros 1955–1975," in *Queer Difficulty in Art and Poetry: Rethinking the Sexed Body in Verse and Visual Culture*, eds. Jongwoo Jeremy Kim and Christopher Reed (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2017), 74–86.

[30] Marcuse, "Art in the One-Dimensional Society," 29.

[31] Jean-Louis Ferrier, Jacques Boetsch, Francoise Giroud, and Herbert Marcuse, "Marcuse Defines his New Left Line," *New York Times*, October 27, 1968, 87.

[32] Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 139.

Marcuse abandoned what was, finally, a more or less exclusively figural, speculative, impractical emphasis on the liberatory potential of the sexual reification of the body."[33] Such abandonment plays out in Marcuse's artworld texts too, as he soon publicly reneges on the vague optimism of his 1967 essay, around the same time *An Essay on Liberation* hit bookshelves in 1969. In a remarkably swift about-face, in a lecture at the Guggenheim Museum titled "Art as Form of Reality" delivered on April 22, 1969, Marcuse proclaims to the museum audience (including Battcock) that anti-art is actually "self-defeating" because "in this universe, the work of art, as well as anti-art, becomes *exchange* value, commodity."[34] According to Marcuse, the best art can do is provide "utility for the soul or the mind which does not enter the normal behavior of men and does not really change it—except for just that short period of elevation, the cultured holiday."[35]

"However, what if Marcuse is wrong, and the rebellious forms are NOT absorbed by the market and defanged by it?"[36] Battcock asks, pointedly, in "Marcuse and Anti-Art II." Working within this "somewhat claustrophobic dilemma,"[37] as he calls it, Battcock proceeds uneasily in contradictory directions. On the one hand, he puts forth a utopian queer vision in which "anti-art" and "anti-criticism" prefigure freedom from capitalist exploitation by engendering new genres of artistic practice that excite the body and resist categorization and commodification. This queer utopian vision accords with David Joselit's sense that, more than anyone, Battcock understood the "real legacy" of conceptual art as a shift from authored, commodifiable artworks to open-ended situations characterized by exchanges of information.[38] And significantly, rather than exchanges marked by a bland "aesthetic of administration" (to invoke Benjamin H.D. Buchloh's phrase),[39] Battcock heralds the possibility of art engendering promiscuous, turned-on communication that activates the whole body in pursuit of assuasive pleasure.

On the other hand, Battcock adopts an "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" kind of attitude at odds with this anti-capitalist, queer utopian vision. Rather than worry overmuch about Marcuse's abandonment, beginning around August 1969 Battcock goes his own way—assembling and advancing a pseudo-Marcusian "anti-" practice focused on trivial, gossipy, erotic, fuck-off-I'm-having-fun sorts of things: food, fine wine, luxurious travel (often on ocean liners), and lots of edgy sex. Embracing Marcuse's goal of making "the human body an instrument of pleasure rather than labor," Battcock really does it. But the result is not anti-

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[33] Ibid., 122.

[34] Herbert Marcuse, "Art as Form of Reality" in *On the Future of Art: Sponsored by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum*, ed. Edward Fry (New York: The Viking Press, 1970), 123–34. Emphasis in the original.

[35] Marcuse, "Art as Form of Reality," 126.

[36] Battcock, "Marcuse and Anti-Art II," 20.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Joselit, "Transformer: Gregory Battcock," 511.

[39] See: Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (winter 1990), 105–43

capitalist or antiestablishment, and certainly it isn't utopian. Rather, Battcock reproduces some of the worst racist, classist, sexist colonial logics of a capitalist system—especially as he frequently brags in his columns about escapades with young, Puerto-Rican men (teens?), whom he frequently refers to in print as his "houseboys." As in, for example, from a column in *Gay* dated May 10, 1970: "My houseboy needed $10.00 which I didn't have so I explained how he could go out to Third Avenue and hustle—which he did."[40] Or, perhaps even worse, a year and a half earlier, in a column published January 30, 1969 in the *Free Press*, Battcock explains why he didn't join the newly-formed Artworkers' Coalition delegation to deliver the group's initial "13 Demands" to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). He was vacationing in Martinique instead. "One nice thing about the French Antilles is that there is no art," he proclaims. And digging in even deeper, he continues, "I wasn't getting enough sun and wonder if some of the black of the inhabitants might rub off but I don't think I will have the chance to get close enough to find out. They're very puritanical and that's very boring."[41] The AWC's petition to MoMA turned out to be a key watershed moment in the history of art and activism that inaugurated "a polemical redefinition of artistic labor vital to minimalism, process art, feminist art criticism, and conceptualism," as Bryan-Wilson has demonstrated.[42]

Battcock's decision to proclaim in print, in casually racist terms, that he went cruising in Martinique rather than petitioning at MoMA doesn't feel much like a utopian project or a viable political strategy. But Battcock's contradictory visions—for a genuine "anti-art" of freedom *and* for a sarcastic, chauvinistic "slavish devotion to a neo-capitalistic pleasure principle"—coexist in the same fraught project. The tension between these visions becomes most palpable and poignant in Battcock's writings during the summer of 1969, right after he moved his column to the *New York Review of Sex* and renamed it "The Last Estate." For a brief period when everything was up in the air—just before Battcock would conclude that Marcuse is a "total reactionary," and just as New York City was welling up with the liberation energy that would erupt at Stonewall on June 28th—a vision for genuine, anti-capitalist queer liberation seemed, somehow, possible. Until, perhaps, it didn't.

The Last Estate

After proclaiming in his first "The Last Estate" column of June 1, 1969 (see Fig. 1) that he would stick to three main points ("1. *New York Review of Sex*; 2. Morality and Herbert Marcuse; 3. Jill Johnston, modern criticism, and miscellaneous notes"), Battcock stays with the program for two more columns (Fig. 4, Fig. 5). Then things did indeed get "too fucked up" and the *NYRS* did soon go bust—both as he had predicted.[43]

Battcock identifies Johnston as the foremost exponent of "anti-art" and of "anti-

[40] Gregory Battcock, "The Last Estate," *Gay*, May 18, 1970. The "friend" who works for *Life* that Battcock references is, quite likely, David Bourdon, who was indeed the arts correspondent for *Life Magazine*.

[41] Gregory Battcock, "Art: Letter from Martinique," *New York Free Press*, January 30, 1969, 12.

[42] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 1.

[43] Gregory Battcock, "The Last Estate," *New York Review of Sex,* June 1, 1969, 17.

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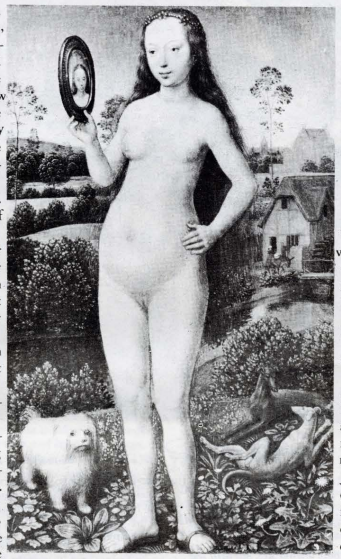
THE LAST ESTATE

By Gregory Battcock



I've been thinking about space and wonder if it might be a relative phenomenon, as opposed to an absolute or constant one. For example, we assume that in the good old days, there was plenty of space around, and people didn't think about space too much. There was no threat of a population explosion, cities weren't threatened with crises and there was plenty of room. Nowadays, we seem to be acutely aware of space and frequently the lack of it. In art, sculptors have concerned themselves with a new problem-how is it possible to displace space without actually using it up? How can it be used and not squandered? Carl Andre and Sol Lewitt have devised schemes whereby only the ground, or floor is used, and the space above the ground is left empty so it can be enjoyed as a valuable, environmental commodity.

It's true things are getting more crowded. But has this fact diminished the availability of empty space, in the largest sense? Ingeneral,how do we evaluate or experience space and base our judgements that are made upon space? Probably by the time(speed)in which we can travel through space. Space that we cannot move through doesn't count as space. It cannot be possessed or physically experienced therefore, for all practical purposesit isn't there. Nowadays we can move through space more quickly than ever before. So what does this mean?

What it might mean is that we should not automatically decide that space is more valuable nowadays simply because there are more people around and, therefore, more people and stuff using it (space) up. From a short range, immediate viewpoint,such an assumption seems to make sense. But it is based upon old fashioned means of movement—slow systems that rendered it difficult to experience new space, to get at unoccupied space and to move away from overcrowded space. Space as well as getting and being spaced are both new problems. They have been explored by the scientist, even more thanby the artist. What the new sculptors are doing is perhaps less relevant in terms of spacial innovation and more important in that they are moving toward a condition that may ultimately preclude one essential condition that all art up until now, has held. And this condition is one of possession, or ownership, or simply commodity. The new artist is inventing art works that cannot easily be possessed, bought, sold, or that can act according to the formal conditions of a capitalist market that sees value in a class stratified "consumer economy." In this vein, Herbert Marcuse (who remains one of the three major subjects of this column, the others being THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF SEX and the art criticism of Jill Johnston, both related and unrelated incidentally) writes in his *Essay on Liberation:*

The so-called consumer economy and the politics of corporate capitalism have created a second nature of man which ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form. The need for possessing, consuming, handling and constantly renewing the gadgets, devices, instruments, engines, offered to and imposed upon the people, for using these wares even at the danger of one's own destruction, has become a "biological" need...

"The market has always been one of exploitation and thereby of domination, insuring the class structure of society."

There were signs pasted on this taxi I took the other day which said DON'T BUY FRENCH GOODS and I thought yes, that's right, why don't I just go to France instead and experience space; it's better than getting further entrapped in the consumer-possessor-commodity form. Why stop by not buying French goods? DON'T BUY ANY GOODS the sign should have read. So I didn't have enough bread to make it to France so went to Fort de France (Martinique) instead and David Bourdon came along. I'm hoping we can cook up some conspiracy but food and sun and wine have taken care of all that. Anyway, 24 hours in transit getting here because His Majesty the Cardinal Archbishop clogged up the Long Island Expressway with his motorcade bringing him back from his medieval pomp and circumstances with the Holy Horror (I mean Father) in Rome. What happened was 1. David said not to mention his name in this column —he dosen't have to worry, I won't say anything nice) 2. we missed the plane so had to take aTrans Carribean plane to P.R.—There were only 8 passengers on the "Floating Island" so they wouldn't let me sit in the back where I always like to sit because I would interfere with the weight distribution of the Super DC 8 Jet. I weigh 135 pounds I said to the stewardess who was wearing an Argentine Gaucho hat (she finally took it off). "We also have freight aboard, sir" she says. "I know. I can see it" I say. What all this means is that we have to stay overnight in P.R. which I made the be[illegible] by calling up my friend. What follows is t[illegible]od part, which there's no point going into except we get a room at the airport hotel, for David, and I went to town, figuratively and literally.

One nice thing about this hotel in Martinique is that nobody ever stays here. The management does everything within its power to discourage arrivals and, should that fail, lengthy stays. There are no activities whatsoever. There is no music, no discotheques, no free pineapple punch. Just finding out about the place is practically impossible—they don't advertise, there is no sign, it's an a remote place, well off the main road, on a remote island. On a table in the lobby there are some copies of French magazines from 1968. They do however charge an arm and a leg.

But, why don't I start on David Bourdon who was very brave about missing the plane, and finally we caughtan "Island Hopper" and spent seven hours on it and got to St. Kitts and Grenada, but missed Domenica because there was a storm. The steward told some lady who wanted to get off at Domenica that the plane wouldn't stop there today. She says "It's just as well. I don't care where I go. I hate flying anyway."

David Bourdon, who is well known and influencial in art, is something of a trooper as well. David is especially good at thinking up titles for things and thought up a nice title for my anthology on music—"The New Music: Breaking the Sound Barrier." David and me had a long chat about Jill Johnston as a critic of art. Up until recently, art criticism was about rather formal and descriptive items. The critic interpreted the art object according to traditional aesthetic and objective criteria. He tried to be as objective as he could, and it was thought that objectivity was a value in itself.

Today's critic isn't nearly so sure of himself. Subjectivity is tolerated. In art criticism, like in everything else the formal procedures are questioned and, usually found wanting. So what is today's critic doing? Criticism, be it artistic, literary, music or dance is nothing like it used to be. Who are the new critics? What does this new view mean? How is it related to art, and politics, and culture? The whole thing is really a mess. It's extremely difficult to figger out. Well something is happening and nobody is interested in finding out what it is I'm afraid . Everybody says they want to know but all they really want is to tell you how wrong you are.

For varoius reasons, the new criticism is, today best represented by Jill Johnston in her column "Dance Journal" which runs in the VOICE. Jill isn't nearly as fucked up as some people who read her column think she is. She comes to criticism from an extremely thorough background. She has been through the critical mill and comes out on top. Them that are fucked up are, as usual, them assistant professors again who can't stand any authoritive assault against their precious conventions —conventions that simply mark them the "kept intellectuals" they are. In another column I would like to expand on several subjects only superficially indicated above. They are: 1. David Bourdon, 2. Jill Johnston, 3. New Criticism (quiticism) 4. the rest of Martinique-P.R. trip. 5. The NYRS.

4. Gregory Battcock, "The Last Estate," *New York Review of Sex & Politics*, June 15, 1969, 17. Collection of Jennifer Sichel (scan courtesy of author).

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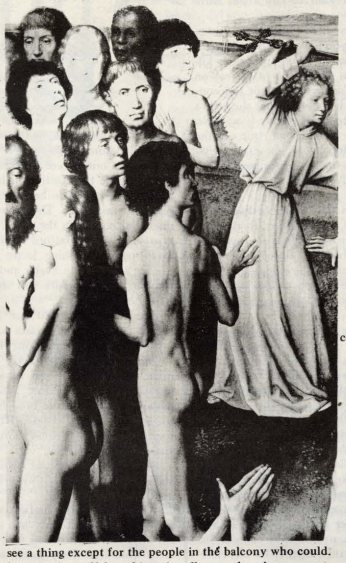
THE LAST ESTATE



By Gregory Battcock

I was talking with Michael Benedikt the day after I got back from the French Antilles, and he said: Gregory, when you started writing for the New York Review of Sex you fucked yourself," and promptly submitted some of his really nice new poems to the paper.

Lately I've been complaining to the editor because my pieces were always stuck with horrendous photographs of open cunts and any matter of vulgarity. After my complaints, I started getting illustrated with line drawings from Beardsley and paintings by Crannach (I think) and my friend Bob the lawyer called me up and told me what happened at the Columbia pool when he went there for an afternoon dip. (I'll tell the point of this story ahead of time. It's that not only don't we know nothing about what is obscene and isn't but we don't even know who to explain it all to.) Anyway, Bob marches into the pool stark naked—it's full of little children and one of the little boys has hair longer than the rest, Bob doesn't notice—— so you know the story, it turns out there's a girl snuck in somehow, but there's guys swimming naked so they got to get rid of her, they say, "little girl what you doin there, get out." She's all upset cries, can't imagine why she has to get out. Why should she I don't know, except I know that's obscene: making her go. Columbia doesn't deserve a new gym if that's what they do there. Gyms are what's wrong with education in America today-group sports are a substitute for learning in case you didn't know. The whole thing about learning is that the student is coming into contact with humanity but after five hours of gym who needs contact and the yearning for learning isn't the same

PATIENCE

"The disintegration of a Critic: an analysis of Jill Johnston," panel discussion at N.Y.U. on Wednesday night For ten weeks before the thing Jill is phoning every day so is David Bourdon, moderator. Nobody was sure who would show up though practically everybody did in the end. The panel, which consisted of Ultra Violet, John Menil, Lol Picard, Walter Gutman, Bridget Polk, Andy Warhol, Charlotte Moorman, me, is supposed to meet ahead of time for a chat. We arrange to have a little wine and snacks at SHOEI on West 8th Street. Everybody arrives, and they start serving stuff at SHOEI except they're slow, but everything is exquisite. The sashimi, the tempura, the sake nice and warm, hot towels. The panel is at Loeb at 8:30. At 8:30 they're bringing us more Mersault at Shoei. David is a nervous wreck. Lil Picard sends out for some scotch. Andy is taking pictures with his new Polariod. So is Bridget but her's don't come out so good. More fantastic dishes come to the table. We can't tear ourselves away. It's nine o'clock already and still nobody is sure whether or not the panel will come off. Charlotte Moorman is missing. The hotel Paris they don't answer. Bridget orders more sake. Me too. And off we go.

Everything is extremely serious, but like the good lord said, if you don't mind, be so kind and unwind which we did. So we get to Loeb and the audience is all there, thousands of them waiting for only god knows what, we certainly didn't.

CHARLOTTE MOORMAN

Well who should be sitting up there. All by herself, and wrapped in a muslin shroud, but Charlotte Moorman and her cello, drinking beer out of a can wrapped in brown paper bags. The real question is when are the New York mothers really going to get with it, I don't know. With dignity, patience and a little drunkeness, everybody got up there and there weren't enough chairs. The audience is all there. I see Ann Wilson who looks grouchy, sitting in the front row, Perrault is all there too, lots of people waiting and expecting the end all. Jesus. Any minute it could have turned into the Donald O'Connor Show, which is what we had to watch out for. They told me even Lee Steinberg showed up, not to mention all these people from the Voice, and a lot of people who looked like they were from Beanblossom, Indiana, maybe they came on a bus.

Well, David started things off fine, alot of straight talk, everybody listened politely, somebody passed around a little bottle of bourbon, somebody else scotch, Charlotte had her beer, I had a little thing of sake still, The audience warmed up and started hissing, Andy says, "Gregory take out your cock so we can take a picture." so I did, and Andy and Bridget are snapping sway, the audience can't see a thing except for the people in the balcony who could. Bridget takes off her shirt, tits all over the place except the audience is again spared because this big ass table blocks the view. David goes on talking. The audience seems to really know what's going on, they don't want to hear nothing, hissing and yelling, I tried to read something clever I spent the whole afternoon in Riverside park working on, nobody wanted to hear it. O.K. What happened was important. I'd rather sit in the park and do nothing than almost anything else. I'm so busy sitting in the park that I have messengers deliver things, a messenger should have delivered my talk on Jill Johnston.

RIDICULOUS

Panels are ridiculous. Everybody knows that. So how about a panel that really is ridiculous. Well, that's not easy. It has to be serious, have overtones of respectability. It has to be somewhat pompous, yet good taste dictates that, even if it is intended according to new, post-liberation values which don't exist yet include an outrageous mixture--unbelievable, unconventional, esoteric. It's quite possible that the most difficult subject for a panel of crickets to quiticize on is Jill Johnston because I think she knows all about "anti-criticism" which is like "anti-art in a way", it can be accomodated, within the traditional, prevailing institutions, procedures, marketplaces (I think--we don't know yet). That means it can't be analysed on a panel discussion at Loeb Student Center at N.Y.U.

The "anti-criticism" of freedom will meet with opposition and it will come, at least initially, from unexpected places. The new hostilities, and I'm not going into this because if any reader has gotten this far, he surely has had his patience tried just about enough. Most everybody has by now, had their sensibilities progressively dulled by capitalist progress which is happily reducing the environment of freedom and the longing and need for such an environment. This is pure Marcuse without the footnote, and means that even such a simple thing as hostility can be viewed as a potential freedom that is reducible and has been denied.

Why live in a crowded city? Why live anyplace. The disintegration of the railroads coincided with the final collapse and disintegration of the cities in this country and it's amazing that rail transportation is still considered something else--not one or even part of the major areas of post-Vietnam-war concern. Rail transportation is an urban problem. The railroad made the American Cities, and like we now know, they were not only created by, but continued to depend on the railroad. Mercy, there's no point in crying city. That's not nearly the story. Sure, open spaces are nice, but they are not necessarily nice in the city.

Here is what Jill Johnston said (abridged) in the press release she prepared for this panel:

My purpose in arranging this my third and last panel was to offer my name as a sort of sacrifice if you like for the idea (1) of a disintegration of criticism, which I view as outmoded form of communication...A critic has come to be an unpaid publicity agent...the artist expects this of the critic and privately coerces him; the critic has accepted this role and uses the artist to build his own reputation: by the fame of playing off one artist against another...Anybody familiar with the history of art knows how history is made by the winners of the moment: those with the power of money..."

ANTI CRITICISM

This then is what anti-criticism is. Today, the new artist must produce "anti-art"--that is art works that are so opposed to the values and terminology of the mainstream of Western artistic tradition that they cannot be accommondated within the existing institutions; the prevailing values and criteria don't apply. In order to be awarded the "anti-art" label, these works must require different receptive faculties on the part of the observer; receptive faculties that for the most part haven't been developed yet.

Obviously there is a problem. How can one even recognize anti-art when you see it. Well, usually you can't. As a matter of fact, it might well be the first criterion--at any rate a criterion for this time and place for art--that it not be recognizable, identifiable, that we not know it when we see it. That is, not know it's ART when we see it. Anti-art works must not only be difficult to accept as art, but they must be unacceptable as art. The anti-art notion doesn't stop with art, of course. All communicative forms must develop a negative, or "anti" expression. We must have "anti-journalism", which should not be recognized as journalism in any traditional definition of the term, an anti-fourth estate. And anti-criticism.

An "anti-art" must develop as it must accompany and more than that, it must create an over-all environment of true freedom. So must we develop an "anti-criticism" of freedom. This is terribly important. It will meet with tremendous opposition--everybody thinks Jill Johnston is a quack, everybody respectable that is. Most of the antagonism to anti forms will, at least initially, come from unexpected areas, as I already mentioned. The new obstructionists against qualitative change in criticism will come from the same class who are now deploring violence and telling us we must all love one another... the traditional liberal class is traditionally devoted to protection of liberties within the capitalist system. This class is an unlikely adversary, and will be difficult to confront. At least the police and military wear uniforms and we can see them and we know precisely where they stand, guns, helicopters and all. The new obstructionists delaying the advent of revolution will come from a class that has, up until now, supported art, artistic freedom and has encouraged artistic license. However since "anti-art", (like "anti-journalism" and "anti-criticism") neither depends upon nor even cares about any of such traditional freedoms permitted within the capitalist class system, the liberal intellectual class that used to occupy itself with nothing at all to do-- robbed of their only function with nothing to replace it. They are the kept intellectuals and they are housed today within the various liberal institutions that further and deliberately encourage intellectual elitism. One result from the inevitable reconstruction of the sensibility by the anti-worker will be an ending to the subtle class stratifications within the intellectual marketplaces. Grades, course requirements, degrees are already worthless. The university knows this, yet hangs on for dear life itself; however, let them hang on because they are dead already and it doesn't matter.

The anti-worker has to liberate himself from prevailing terminology, classifications and categorizations. In criticism (quiticism) only Jill Johnston and Gene Swenson have so far, been able to do it. In Journalism SCREW, N.Y.R.S., GOTHIC BLIMP WORKS, OTHER SCENES have done it.

In art the "conceptual" artists have done it: so has Ann Wilson. In book publishing Walter Gutman has done it. "Anti-Cinema" comes from Warhol; "anti-music" comes from John Cage. I used to tell the editor to stop putting shocking, perverted pictures next to my text. That was a stupid request and showed that I didn't know what was going on.

5. Gregory Battcock, "The Last Estate," *New York Review of Sex & Politics*, July 1, 1969, 16. Collection of Jennifer Sichel (scan courtesy of author).

criticism" or "quiticism"—without any clear demarcation between them, which is the point. When it comes to "anti-" practices, genres get conflated. At the end of his first "The Last Estate" column, Battcock explains,

> What someone has to do is get out of all these identifications and categories but only Jill Johnston so far as I know, has really been able to do it. Its [sic] very hard. Nobody wants you to do it. [...] Jill can do it because she's smart and has learned to stop listening to what people say. Her work, which I think is criticism, doesn't fit into any existent definition of criticism and that's what makes it the best criticism around today.[44]

"Jill isn't nearly as fucked up as some people who read her column think she is," Battcock asserts in his second "The Last Estate" column, published June 15th.

> Today's critic isn't nearly so sure of himself. Subjectivity is tolerated. In art criticism, like in everything else, the formal procedures are questioned and, usually found wanting. So what is today's critic doing? Criticism, be it artistic, literary, music or dance is nothing like it used to be. Who are the new critics? What does this new view mean? How is it related to art, and politics, and culture? The whole thing is really a mess. It's extremely difficult to figger [sic] out. Well something is happening and nobody is interested in finding out what it is I'm afraid. Everybody says they want to know but all they really want is to tell you how wrong you are.
>
> For various reasons, the new criticism is, today best represented by Jill Johnston in her column "Dance Journal" which runs in the VOICE. [...] She comes to criticism from an extremely thorough background. She has been through the critical mill and comes out on top. Them that are fucked up are, as usual, them assistant professors again who can't stand any authoritative assault against their precious conventions—conventions that simply mark them as the "kept intellectuals" they are.[45]

For his third "The Last Estate" column, Battcock writes an extended analysis of his participation on a panel discussion titled "The Disintegration of a Critic: An Analysis of Jill Johnston," which took place at New York University's Loeb Student Center on May 21, 1969.[46] "This then is what anti-criticism is," Battcock proclaims near the end of the column.

> Today, the new artist must produce "anti-art"—that is art works that are so opposed to the values and terminology of the mainstream of Western artistic tradition that they cannot be accommondated [sic] within the existing institutions; the prevailing values and criteria don't apply. In order to be awarded the "anti-art" label, these works must require different receptive faculties on the part of the observer; receptive faculties that for the most part haven't been developed yet. Obviously there is a problem. How can

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Battcock, "The Last Estate," *New York Review of Sex,* June 15, 1969, 17.

[46] Chapter 2 of my forthcoming book *Criticism without Authority*, titled "The Disintegration of a Critic: Gene Swenson and Jill Johnston's Protests and Panels," includes an extended analysis of Johnston's panel discussion.

> one even recognize anti-art when you see it. Well, usually you can't. As a matter of fact, it might well be the first criterion—at any rate a criterion for this time and place for art—that it not be recognizable, identifiable, that we not know it when we see it. That is, not know it's ART when we see it.
>
> [...] An "anti-art" must develop as it must accompany and more than that, it must create an over-all environment of true freedom. This is terribly important. It will meet with tremendous opposition—everybody thinks Jill Johnston is a quack, everybody respectable that is. [...] The new obstructionists delaying the advent of revolution will come from a class that, up until now, supported art, artistic freedom and has encouraged artistic license. However since "anti-art", (like "anti-journalism" and "anti-criticism") neither depends upon nor even cares about any of such traditional freedoms permitted within the capitalist class system.[47]

...

Within these first three "The Last Estate" columns from the summer of 1969, Battcock extolls possibilities for "quiticism" in the new underground offset sex papers. The idea here is that in a fleeting period while they are still "new"—before they get busted, fold, or become acceptable and predictable—the sex papers furnish fragile, provisional spaces for artistic critiques that address "new obstructionists" in ways that are not immediately recuperable by the establishment. They furnish platforms for "anti-" practices that cannot quite be internalized by capitalism—at least, not instantly—because the practices do not cohere well enough or make enough sense; or because they are too embarrassing, raunchy, confessional; or because they are too perverted; or because they are "too boring, too ridiculous, just plain stupid" (as Battcock writes of Warhol's films); or too hopeful; or any combination of these things. But how to sustain this "anti-" creative energy? For Battcock, the key question becomes how it's possible to work within the "somewhat claustrophobic dilemma," as he would later call it, in which the "rebellious forms" are almost instantly "absorbed by the market and defanged by it."[48] And on this account, he turns to Johnston for inspiration and for resources.

More than anyone else, according to Battcock, Johnston manages to keep working within the dilemma, and to make it more capacious. Their friend and fellow critic Gene Swenson manages "to do it" too, albeit less consistently—and Swenson died tragically in August 1969, while he was still in the throes of figuring things out. When it comes to Johnston, though, Battcock lauds how she's able to sustain her practice in an unresolved state. Her work "doesn't fit into any existent definition of criticism and that's what makes it the best criticism around today"[49]—something she manages to do for years, publishing every single week, constantly innovating along the way. And Battcock takes notes. At the end of 1969, when he moves "The Last Estate" from the *NYRS* to *Gay*, he establishes a new formula that takes its cues from Johnston's "Dance Journal" column in the *Village Voice*. He adopts hallmarks of Johnston's style: clever word play, repetition, first-person address, stream-of-

[47] Gregory Battcock, "The Last Estate," (July 1, 1969), 16.

[48] Battcock, "Marcuse and Anti-Art II," 20.

[49] Battcock, "The Last Estate," June 1, 1969, 17.

consciousness writing, use of fragments, found phrases, twisted grammars, and colloquialisms. Like Johnston, Battcock furnishes an ongoing chronicle of his daily encounters—where he goes, how he gets there, who he meets, who he fucks, and what he eats—full of gossipy tidbits about himself and the artists in his circle. He peppers his columns with tributes to Johnston, such as: "What I'm trying to say, before I am accused, once again, by readers who, silly geese everyone of them imagine I'm imitating the great Jill Johnston, is that no matter where you are, there is some fool around who'll remind you of home."[50]

However, Battcock also departs from Johnston in fundamental ways. In response to the "somewhat claustrophobic dilemma" in which art can feel impossible, Johnston trawls her inner life, embracing darkness and failures, in search of resources to keep working. "It's *always* a dilemma,"[51] Johnston writes in March 1971—and she stays with the trouble. By contrast, Battcock writes from an altogether less sincere, more guarded place. Rather than searching his inner life for resources to keep working, Battcock trawls the world in search of trivial things, as he explains in an *Arts Magazine* article published November, 1970, titled "A la Recherche du Temps Trivial" (his third and final follow up to "Marcuse and Anti-Art II"). Battcock proclaims: "Art is high, sex low, etc. Why should it be? [...] What is the lowest common denominator? Have we really hit rock bottom? Let us rediscover trivia, the banal and the obvious."[52]

By the start of 1970, Battcock adopts an almost entirely cynical stance toward the Marcusian artistic critique of capitalism—aiming for rock bottom, so it seems. He also adopts a contemptuous, lazy stance toward organized political activism. "We shouldn't make compromises anymore I don't think," Battcock writes in a "The Last Estate" column published August 16, 1969—written in the aftermath of Stonewall, in the midst of a "truly open season on homosexuals," as Battcock puts it, with "cops harassing homosexuals as usual."[53] Battcock loosely advocates a kind of hands-off approach: let the whole thing go to shit so people will show their true colors, and then everyone else might get jolted out of complacency. "Rather no freedom, since half freedom is stupid," Battcock explains, without a high degree of rigor. "With half freedom we can't move forward, instead we are stuck with the kept intellectuals constantly bewailing censorship, and trying to decide what is the difference between freedom

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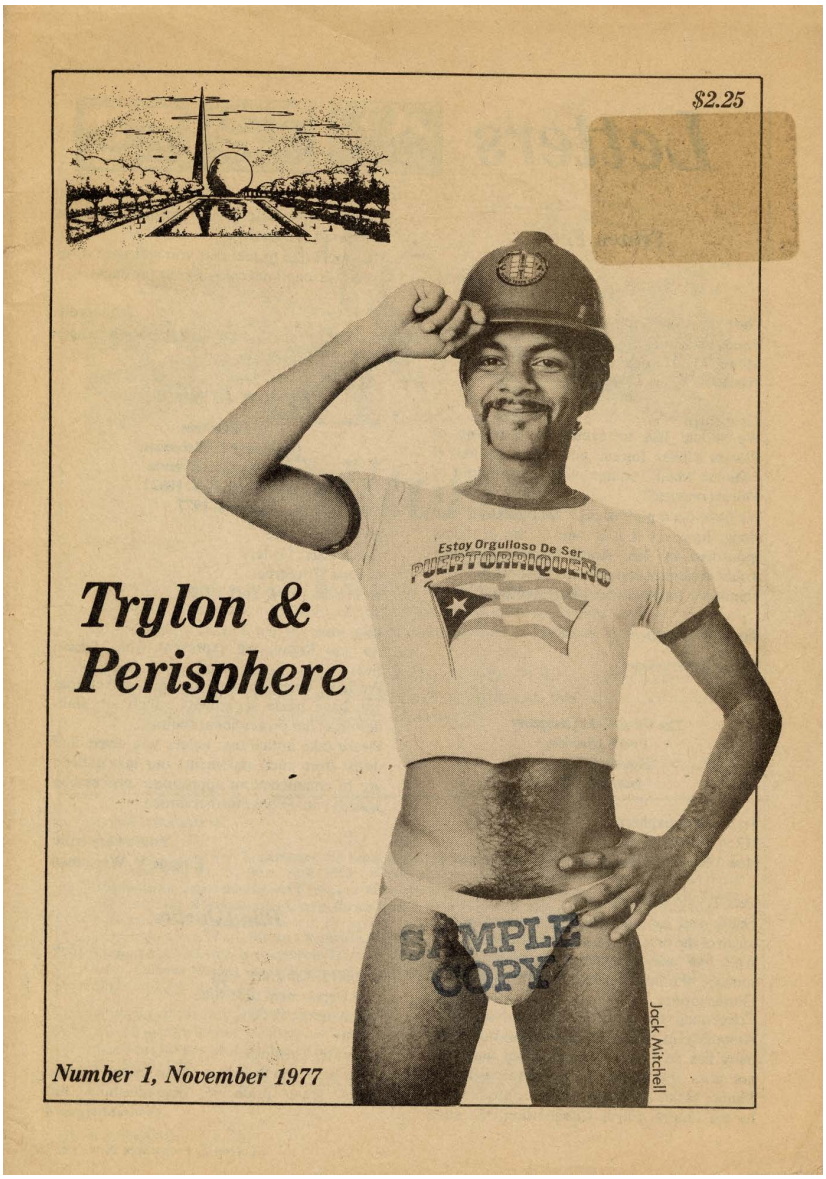
[50] Gregory Battcock, "The Last Estate," *Gay*, September 28, 1970, 13. Clipping from Gregory Battcock papers, 1952–circa 1980. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[51] Jill Johnston, "Lois Lane Is a Lesbian (1)," *Village Voice*, March 4, 1971, 64. Emphasis original.

[52] Gregory Battcock, "A la Recherche du Temps Trivial," *Arts Magazine*, November 1970, 40–41.

[53] Gregory Battcock, "The Last Estate: Queens in Queens," *The New York Review of Sex*, August 16, 1969, 21. In the column, Battcock refers to an incident in Queens in which, according to an article in the *New York Times*, a "vigilante committee" of 30 to 40 men had been set up in the neighborhood to "harass the homosexuals" in the park at night. The article quotes a woman as saying "Yeah, the vigs [sic] would go out at night and pick on the fags until the fags couldn't take it any more," and then they chopped down the trees in an act of vandalism with no repercussions from the police. See: David Bird, "Trees in a Queens Park Cut Down as Vigilantes Harass Homosexuals," *New York Times*, July 1, 1969, 1, 29.



6. Cover of *Trylon & Perisphere* 1, November 1977. Collection of Jennifer Sichel (scan courtesy of author).

and license, or some shit."[54] So rather than engage with that "shit," Battcock just does his own thing. In a "The Last Estate" column published in *Gay* on May 24, 1971, Battcock explains:

> In case the reader wonders, I see MY contribution to society as being something of a "guru in search of the trivial." Largely due to my viewpoint concerning leisure time and how to kill it in the most efficient *profitable* way possible—as long as "profit" has nothing to do with the capitalistic "profit motive" and nothing to do with production of objects and possession of things but rather, in the Marxist view, profit in the experiences that exist without object, or in sensual experience of objects that cease to

[54] Battcock, "The Last Estate: Queens in Queens," 27.

> exist upon consumption (food, sex, wine).[55]

Battcock's embrace of the trivial is, of course, problematic—there's no way around that. Consuming food, sex, and wine is obviously not a particularly viable anticaptialist strategy. Indeed, Battcock pushes the most problematic parts of his practice up to the surface—at times, it seems, as a middle finger (of sorts) aimed at the "kept intellectuals" and "traditional liberal class," with their status-quo-maintaining, incessant handwringing. In a sense, Battcock was ahead of the curve in quickly realizing that a Marcusian artistic critique of capitalism fails in key ways. His responses to that apparent failure are varied and contradictory. In works like his first three "The Last Estate" columns from the summer of 1969, Battcock expresses faith that "anti-art" can still pave the way for liberation. In other places, including in many of his "The Last Estate" columns from the '70s, Battcock responds with a hardened cynicism.

Trylon & Perisphere

Battcock's cynicism reaches an endpoint around 1977, with the publication of the first issue of his own newsprint art magazine *Trylon & Perisphere* (Fig. 6).[56] Battcock published only two more issues before the magazine folded, for reasons that are unclear. An advertising memo for the magazine proclaims:

> Q. What in the world is *Trylon & Perisphere*?
> A. A humpy arts magazine—outrageous, provocative and a scream.
> Q. What is it about?
> A. Nothing. It's about pretense. And posing. And the art world.
> Q. How can you get it?
> A. By subscription. Only $14.00 for ten issues. It's the *only* art magazine anybody reads.[57]

An editorial on the first page of the first issue declares that the magazine is: "Dedicated to the world of tomorrow that will never be. *Trylon* is a celebration of the cynical, the profane and the droll" (Fig. 7).[58] The description is accurate. In a letter dated May 15, 1977, Battcock specifies, "All pieces must be funny. They must succeed is [sic] DEMOLISHING their subject,

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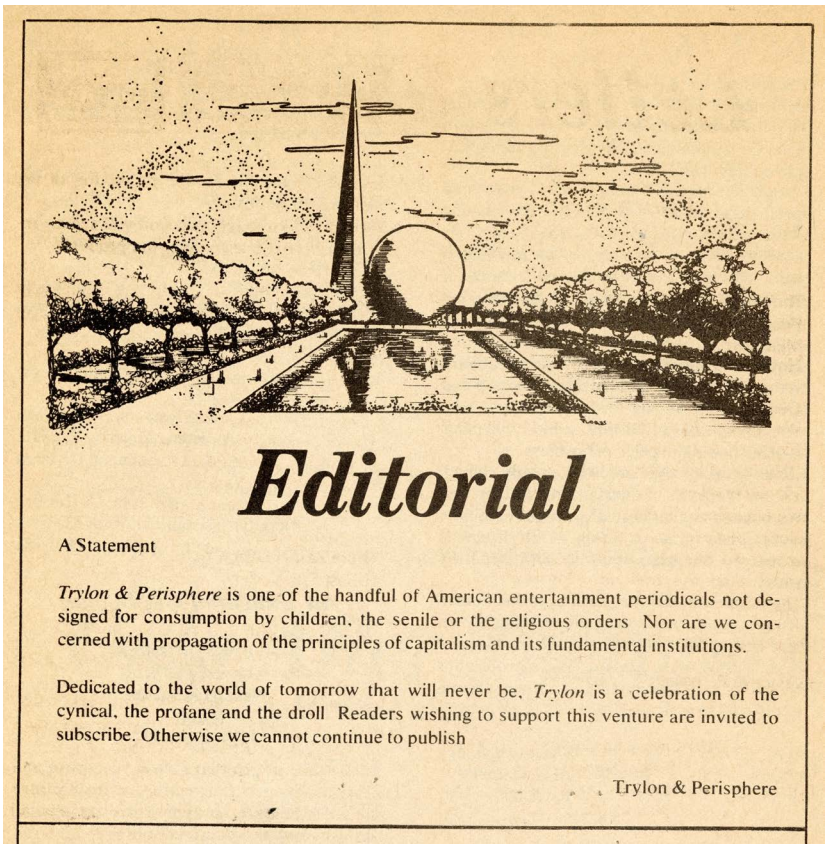
[55] Gregory Battcock, "The Last Estate," *Gay*, May 24, 1971. Clipping from Gregory Battcock papers, 1952–circa 1980. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This quote is also reproduced in Joseph Grigely, "Introduction: The Battcock Factor" in *Oceans of Love: The Uncontainable Gregory Battcock*, ed. Joseph Grigely (London: Koenig Books, 2016), 3. Emphasis in the original.

[56] These years also mark significance changes in Marcuse's own position on art and politics, which culminated with the publication of *The Aesthetic Dimension* in 1977. See: Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977).

[57] Advertisement on Trylon & Perisphere letterhead with a detachable order form. Clipping, Gregory Battcock papers, 1952–circa 1980, folder 2.22. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[58] "Editorial: A Statement," *Trylon & Perisphere* 1 (November 1977), 3.



Editorial

A Statement

Trylon & Perisphere is one of the handful of American entertainment periodicals not designed for consumption by children, the senile or the religious orders Nor are we concerned with propagation of the principles of capitalism and its fundamental institutions.

Dedicated to the world of tomorrow that will never be, *Trylon* is a celebration of the cynical, the profane and the droll Readers wishing to support this venture are invited to subscribe. Otherwise we cannot continue to publish

Trylon & Perisphere

7. "Editorial," *Trylon & Perisphere* 1, November 1977, 3 (detail). Collection of Jennifer Sichel (scan courtesy of author).

i.e. don't write about something unless you hate it."[59] The first issue of *Trylon & Perisphere* includes, among other things: a frivolous report on gallerist Judith von Baron; an account of the tchotchkes and concessions people bought at the SOHO Artists Day festival; a report on the art historians who showed up to the Cézanne opening at MoMA and their goody-bags; and a rating of art galleries according to "décor, friendliness of staff, spaciousness, lighting, attire of personnel, quality of clientele, and last, but not least, quality of the artworks exhibited."[60]

The cover of the first issue of *Trylon & Perisphere* features a photo by Jack Mitchell of Neftali Medina—who, as Joselit notes in a disquieting and strange aside, was Battcock's "companion at the time, who would later be a suspect in the critic's unsolved and gruesome 1980 murder in San Juan, Puerto Rico."[61] Just as unsettlingly, in his analysis of Battcock's archive, artist Joseph Grigely notes in passing: "Each cover [of *Trylon & Perisphere*] featured a Puerto Rican male, all close friends—'houseboys,' as they were called—who lived with Battcock."[62]

[59] Letter from Battcock addressed to "Dearest, Wittiest, and More Than Brilliant John George," dated May 15, 1977. Gregory Battcock papers, 1952-circa 1980. Folder 2.22. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[60] "Evaluations of Equality," *Trylon & Perisphere* 1 (November 1977), 17. Gregory Battcock papers, 1952–circa 1980, folder 2.22. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[61] Joselit, "Transformer," 508.

[62] Grigely, "Introduction: The Battcock Factor," 34.

Medina wears a tight white jockstrap, a cut-off Puerto Rican pride ringer t-shirt, and a hard-hat. As Battcock specifies in the letter of May 15th: "All cover photos will be done by Jack Mitchell, the celebrated photographer of celebrities. All cover subjects will be black and Puerto Rican males."[63] Each of these "black and Puerto Rican males" contributes an account of domestic work accompanied by gritty, sexy photos, tucked in alongside all the art-world satire and in-crowd jokes. In the first issue, Medina writes about cooking, and in the next two issues Tony (his last name is not given) writes about car maintenance, and José Ramos writes about housekeeping.

All pretense without substance, *Trylon & Perisphere* is exploitative and racist without offering much in return.[64] It indulges the trivial pleasures of art world gossip, parties, food, travel, and sex. By design, *Trylon & Perisphere* is not critical, sincere, or subversive. Within the context of this "humpy arts magazine," Mitchell's photographs could function almost as textbook examples of "the 'brown' body commodified by dominant gay male culture," as theorist Hiram Pérez diagnoses the situation.[65] "Once available to cosmopolitan consumption, the brown body generates desire," Pérez writes. "It provides cosmopolitan gay male subjects with objects of desire and with the superabundant raw material from which to compose the story of that desire. [...] He gets to have his brown body and eat it, too." [66] Indeed, Mitchell's photographs in the context of *Trylon & Perisphere* provide pretty much that, without apology.

Trylon & Perisphere's dedication "to the world of tomorrow that will never be" announces less a world-building project than an abdication of any such project. I think it's fair to say that *Trylon & Perisphere* gives up: not just on the art *world*—which, as Battcock notes elsewhere, "in each and all of its many parts, industries, investment agencies, educational, museum, aesthetic institutions is corrupt"[67]—but also on art. As a magazine that is "outrageous, provocative and a scream," all about "nothing," "pretense," and "posing," *Trylon & Perisphere* represents one possible end point of "quiticism": a result in which the space left behind by discrete works of art, judgment, and analysis gets filled with trivia, frivolity, pleasure, racism, sexism, and edgy indulgence. It represents a failure—and not the artful kind of failure that "allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development" and "provides the opportunity to use negative affects to poke holes in the toxic

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[63] Letter from Battcock addressed to "Dearest, Wittiest, and More Than Brilliant John George," dated May 15, 1977. Gregory Battcock papers, 1952–circa 1980. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[64] I am grateful for Daniel Spaulding's incisive pushback on this point. Offering an alternative reading of *Trylon & Perisphere*, Spaulding suggests that in making space for racialized proletarian men to describe their experiences on the job, Battcock perhaps also offers a politics that complicates the automatic association of reproductive labor—cooking, cleaning, maintenance—with women in feminist theory.

[65] Hiram Pérez, "You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It, Too!" *Social Text*, vol. 23, nos. 3–4 (fall-winter 2005), 171.

[66] Ibid., 185-86.

[67] Document titled "Outline for a Novel on the Art World" dated December 30, 1979. Gregory Battcock papers, 1952–circa 1980. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

positivity of contemporary life," as Jack Halberstam elucidates in the book *The Queer Art of Failure*.[68] It's just failure, an end point with nowhere else to go.

Moments of productive, queer failure do exist in Battcock's oeuvre—when "alternative ways of knowing and being" that are not "mired in nihilistic critical dead ends" come into provisional focus.[69] They tend, I think, to occur when he is in the throes of figuring it out, and of juggling competing imperatives: when Battcock confronts the realization that existing concepts and vocabularies for art are impoverished, incapable of capturing even just his own queer ways of experiencing things aesthetically outside codified genres. Such moments also tend to cluster around Battcock's attention to Swenson and especially Johnston. In these moments, sincere language about morality punctuates Battcock's vocabulary. For example, in a 1970 interview with David Bourdon for the fifth (and final) issue of Levine's *Culture Hero*, Burdon asks Battcock, "Who is your favorite art critic?" Battcock replies: "The late Gene Swenson. Through him, I learned all I know about politics and ethics [...] [I asked] Gene Swenson to write guest columns for the *New York Free Press*. Nobody else would publish him and I thought what he had to say was very important."[70] And eulogizing Swenson after his tragic death in 1969, Battcock laments, "Swenson's large and passionately held reformist views give his own single-handed attempts to accomplish them a degree of pathos. [...] When Swenson died, many of us felt as though we had lost our conscience."[71]

In a 1971 preface to Johnston's anthology *Marmalade Me*, Battcock explains: "It is to Johnston's credit that her work is several things all at once. It is poetry. It is criticism. It is history. It is self-revelation."[72] And in an unpublished 1973 text, he proclaims: "For many, Johnston's writings are difficult because they are frequently painful and cutting, full of sharp provocations toward easy values and commonplace motivations. Johnston consistently demands a higher, stricter and, indeed, extravagant morality that many people cannot easily afford."[73]

Whether Battcock met the demands of Swenson's "conscience" or of Johnston's "extravagant morality" remains an open question—sometimes, probably, he did; many times, it seems, he did not. However, it is also true that he did not accept "easy values and commonplace motivations." Rejecting every redefinition of artistic labor that characterized radical artistic practice of the late '60s and early '70s, Battcock forged his own messy, at times questionable ways to keep working.

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[68] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 2–3.

[69] Ibid., 24.

[70] "Gregory Battcock interview by David Bourdon," *Culture Hero*, vol. 1, no. 5 (n.d.), 11.

[71] Gregory Battcock, "The Art Critic as Social Reformer—With a Question Mark," *Art in America* 59 (September–October 1971), 26–27.

[72] Gregory Battcock "Introduction," in Jill Johnston, *Marmalade Me* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc, 1971), 12.

[73] Gregory Battcock, document titled "INTRODUCTION TO JILL JOHNSTON," included with letter addressed to Danny Moses dated November 25, 1973. Gregory Battcock papers, 1952-circa 1980, folder 2.33. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.