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Joselit, David. American Art Since 1945. London, Thames & Hudson, 2003.
Chapter 5: Art as Information, Systems, Sites, Media

David Joselit in chapter 5, *Art as Information, Systems, Sites, Media,* traces the ideological changes within American art after the Fluxus, Pop Art, and Minimalist movements; focusing on the social, economic, and political shifts within these new art making practices. Joselit provides an indepth look at the new interest in art as pure information, communication, and an open ended process, by following leading artists whose work explores these exchanges of information.

With the widespread change in theories about the art object, artists began to redefine artwork as a pure act of communication (Joselit, 129). The presentation of the artwork as an information system became far more relevant than the aesthetic or objecthood of the object itself. Artists began to regard material things or consumer society as irrelevant to an experience of art which instead centered on an exchange of information. This change in outlook was affirmed by Kynaston McShine, who curated the exhibition *Information* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1970. McShine stated, "*with the sense of mobility and change that pervades their time [the exhibiting artists] are interested in ways of rapidly exchanging ideas rather than embalming the idea in an object*" (McShine, 129). This exhibition solidified that the art world generally viewed the art object as obsolete, and that artists were challenging the traditional mode of exhibiting experiences.

With the development and advancement of technology including radio, television, and emerging computer technologies, a new information economy formed.. Information was a commodity and now had a tangible financial worth within the larger economic sphere. The social and economic transformations of the commodification of data and the construction of a media public sphere, created a means in which artists could explore democracy, identity politics, and power dynamics inherent within communication and data exchanges (Gillette, 130).

The publications and broadcasts regarding the Vietnam War, literally brought the war into people's homes, making it clear that oppositional politics were deeply rooted in acts of communication and information exchange (Joselit, 130). These oppositional politics brought the information economy closer to that of the consumer society, and showcased the connections between personal politics and social transformation.

Artist Han Haacke utilized his art practice to articulate connections between the geo-political and art world politics. Haacke participated in the exhibition *Information*, at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1970 with his contribution *MoMa-Poll*. As described in his statement for the exhibition catalogue:

"Two transparent ballot boxes are position in the exhibition, one for each answer to an either-or-question referring to a current socio-political issue. The question is posted with the ballot boxes. The ballots cast in each box are counted photo-electrically and the state of the poll at any given time during the exhibition is available in absolute figures" (McShine).

Haacke was not interested in the contemplation of an art object, or even the materiality of the presented artwork, but instead he was interested in calling attention to the political ties within the institution, and the art world at large. MoMA was an institution massively supported by the Rockefeller family, and Haacke asked museum visitors, *"Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?"* (Seigle, 18-21). This question highlighted and shattered, for those that were aware of Rockefeller's role as a trustee of MoMA, the museums and similar institutions neutrality within the geopolitical sphere.

Even more abundantly clear, Haacke's work shifted the nature of art-viewing as an act of unadulterated perception, similar to that of the Minimalist sculpture, to a politicized mode of giving and receiving information in which the viewer must take a side on volatile issues of the day. *MoMA-Poll* mimicked the way post-war data gathering was exploited by using the museum visitors as an appropriated quantifiable and commodifiable data stream and collection system (Tucker, 130-131).

Haacke believed that the language of art was lodged within broader social and political conflicts, and regarded his work as systems, rather than objects. In an interview Haacke declared "*I believe the term system should be reserved for sculptures in which a transfer of energy, material, or information occurs, and which do not depend on perceptual interpretation*" (Siegel, 131). Haacke's work embraced political and institutional critiques, but also included examination of natural occurring cycles, systems, and energy transforms. Not all artists were interested in complete and naturalistic cycles or systems like Haacke, but instead were interested in open-ended systems or open-ended process art (Joselit, 131).

Process art implied that information as communication was inextricably linked to 'in-formation' as a process. System art pointed out the interconnectedness of matter (natural, social, political, and technological), while process art showcased the tensions or failures in the translation of this matter into form (Joselit, 135). These tensions or failures within the translation of communication to forms, were seen as blind-spots or breakdowns within the process. Artist Bruce Nauman explored these blind-spots by giving too much or too little information. His work charted the psychological dimensions of information exchange, and amplified how perceptual data could orient or disorient a person within an environment (Gillette, 136).

Nauman's practice is not cemented within a single art form, but instead consisted of a philosophical fascination and exploration of the relation between sensory data and subjective experience. This interplay is linguistically explored through a series of flashing neon signs. *Eat/Death* (1972), included a neon sign, with the word *Eat* in yellow occupied within the blue neon letters of the word *Death*. The word eat provides the process to survive, all while being defined by the subjectivity of its extension (Joselit, 137). The exploration of figure to ground relationship existed in both physical form, but also within the subjectivity of the words meanings.

The shifts in ideological motivations and explorations as seen in Haacke's and Nauman's work showcased a change within the art objects of the time. By channelling the flows of information into systems and processes these artists were able to breakaway from Pop Art, Assemblage, Fluxus, and Minimalist's reinvented objects. They did not reframe consumerism as those before had, but instead worked to circumvent the consumerist system altogether (Krauss, 138).

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