THE USE OF TEXT IN ART, 1988 - 1999

By

Christian John Gerstheimer

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Art

1999

ABSTRACT

THE USE OF TEXT IN ART, 1988 - 1999

By

Christian Gerstheimer

Previous studies of text art do not take into account identity politics or the technology of the internet. The studies of Jessica Prinz, Russell Bowman, and Andreas Hapkemeyer with Peter Weiermair contain several interpretive similarities, some differences and omissions. The books *The Return of the Real,* 1996 by Hal Foster and *Avant-Garde and After,* 1995 by Brandon Taylor and several other sources reveal two new factors influencing the use of text in art from 1988-1999; identity politics and the technology of the internet.

Works by Lorna Simpson, Jimmie Durham, Xu Bing and Victoria Vesna will be discussed in order to substantiate the influence of these new factors and to indicate the need for their inclusion with the interpretations by Prinz, Bowman, and Hapkemeyer with Weiermair, thereby producing a critical synthesis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the help of several people in the writing of this thesis. First of all, my thesis committee chairperson Prof. Phylis Floyd; second, the members of my thesis committee, Prof. Susan Bandes and Prof. William Kilbourne; and third, Prof. Kenneth Haltman, Tracy Speaker, John Finlay, John Henry and my parents who all gave me friendly encouragement and constructive criticism along the way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

It is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say.
-Michel Foucault [1]

Jessica Prinz, Russell Bowman, Andreas Hapkemeyer with Peter Weiermair are four

scholars who have examined the use of language in the visual arts of the past thirty years.

All four of these individuals identified a number of factors that influence artists to include

text in art. However, two new factors have appeared in art from 1988-1999 that were not

readily recognizable when their studies were being prepared. These factors, identit

politics and the technology of the internet, are related to simultaneous changes within the

art world and society. These factors should therefore be included in any interpretation of

the art of the past ten years that includes language. I aim to fully explicate these two

factors so that they may be critically synthesized with previous interpretations of text art.

In an effort to clarify how and why these factors are important, I will first examine in

chapter one the concept of postmodernism that will be used here. Several books inform

the view taken here on postmodernism. These books include Hal Foster's 1996 *The

Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, Brandon Taylor's 1995

Avant-Garde and After: Rethinking Art Now, Linda Weintraub's 1996 *Art on the Edge

and Over: Searching for Art's Meaning in Contemporary Society 1970's-1990's*, and

Irving Sandler's 1998 *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960's to the Early*

---

[1] Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, Trans. James Harkness, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, 9.

1

1990's. In the chapter devoted to postmodernism, no overriding viewpoint has been established, therefore numerous, varied sources will be utilized. The discussion of postmodernism will be followed in chapter two by a review of three literature interpretations given for the language in art from 1960-1990. Next in chapters three and four I will examine the two new factors combined with examples by four artists working in different media. These examples will be used to substantiate the claims made and to give the reader a more concrete idea of the art under discussion.

The four artists included in this thesis: Lorna Simpson, Jimmie Durham, Xu Bing and Victoria Vesna, produce text art. They have been chosen because they exemplify in numerous, but varied ways the updated version of postmodernism I am trying to establish. These artists also make it evident why the technology of the internet and identity politics should be critically synthesized with previous interpretations of text art. Their work is not qualitatively better or worse than any of the thousands of other artists that might have been selected, but is unique in the way that it addresses either identity politics, the technology of the internet, or both of these aspects.

If a "look and label" definition must be used to describe the art under investigation it would most likely be "Text Art" or "Word Art," although these labels do not clarify much. Given the limitations of language this thesis arrives at its meaning of text art from two, related definitions currently in use. The first used by Jessica Prinz, the author of *Art Discourse/Discourse in Art,* defines textual art as "a category of work consisting of a link to literature as well as photography etc." For her "textual artworks are neither one thing nor another, but many things in new combinations." Prinz uses the label "hybrid art" to refer to "liminal works which intersect or balance precariously between disciplinary

modes."[2] The second definition on which I rely is that of W. J. T. Mitchell, who defines something that approximates text art. For him this is the "imagetext," which he defines as composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text."[3]

The text art considered here may include spoken text as part of its content, but must have a visual component as well. Text art shares with literature the use of language, however, my thesis is concerned with art and language as related concepts, not with the relations between art and literature.

In an attempt to map out the formal variations, and technical categories of text art, discovered that there are four varieties and three categories of text art. The four formal variations include: text as image, textual images, images combined with text, or either of the above with the spoken word. And the three technical categories include handwritten, mechanically reproduced or printed, and electronic or digital. Where necessary all the works of art discussed here may be identified according to their variety and category.

---

[2] Jessica Prinz, *Art Discourse/Discourse in Art*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991, 8.
[3] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, Chicago: University
Chicago Press, 1994, 89.

Chapter 1

POSTMODERNISM AND THE TEXT IN CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART

A word is worth a thousand pictures.
A picture is worth a thousand words.

This section will present a working definition of postmodernism so that it may be used as the framework for further discussion. This definition draws heavily from the works of Jean-Françios Lyotard, Arthur C. Danto and Jürgen Habermas. In addition to Lyotard, Danto and Habermas I am going to discuss two additional factors, identity politics and the technology of the internet, that have greatly influenced contemporary art. Therefore, these two factors must be included or seen as part of the overall framework that I am constructing.

From Lyotard, Danto and Habermas I have found three, not completely different, characteristics that will serve as the basis of this working version of postmodernism. These are: first, an end to master narratives that made modernity appear synonymous with progress; second, a preference for elements that are hybrid rather than 'pure' giving us heterogeneity without hierarchy, better known as "pluralism;" and third, a challenging of the modern notion of originality.[4] Each of these features is found in the art of Lorna Simpson, Jimmie Durham, Xu Bing, and Victoria Vesna; and a sampling will be considered in detail in chapters three and four.

---

[4] The idea of "the end of master narratives" is based on Jean-Françios Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), the concept of "pluralism" may be found in Arthur Danto's *After the End of Art* (1997) and the "challenging the modern notion of originality" is derived from Jürgen Habermas' *Modernity - An Incomplete Project* (1983).

Several aspects of the three characteristics of postmodernism should be mentioned so that these characteristics are more clearly understood. The first of these aspects is "post-colonial theory," a discourse that should be integrated into the first characteristic of postmodernism and also an integral part of identity politics.

What is known at the end of the twentieth century as "postmodernism" is now closely aligned with what has come to be known as "post-colonial. " Postmodernism and postcolonial theory are "inconvenient labels which cover a wide range of overlapping literary and cultural practices."[5] Because these two theories overlap and are so difficult to distinguish between, important attributes of each should be mentioned. Both post-colonial and postmodernism perspectives emphasize the decentering of discourse, an interest in what is called the "cultural Other" and a policy favoring " hybridity." "Hybridity" is thought to release the power generated by a "clash of cultures."[6] Favoring hybridity allows both postmodernism and post-colonial theory to move on to a new identity that embraces rather than rejects difference and globalization.

Post-colonialism is not simply a kind of postmodernism with politics, but rather it, or this perspective, seeks to deconstruct narratives that hold power over its adherents. [7] Postmodernism is thought to allow "the other" a cultural space of his or her own, while post-colonial theory seeks a space of its own. The "cultural Other" is a term originating in anthropology and refers to "women, people of color, inhabitants of the so-called "Third World," lesbians, and gays, i.e. all groups that have traditionally been denied economic

---

[5] Bill Ashcroft and others. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*, New York: Routledge, 1989, 163.
[6] Bill Ashcroft and others, eds. *Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, New York: Routledge, 1995, 183.
[7] Bill Ashcroft, *The Post-Colonial Studies*, 117.

and political power." [8] Post-colonial theory opposes "both cultural pluralism with its spurious egalitarianism – different cultures in the same time ("The Magicians of the Earth," Pompidou Centre, Paris, 1989) – or cultural relativism – different cultural temporalities in the same "universal" space ("The Primitivism Show," MOMA, New York, 1984).[9] Postcolonial theory advocates active "changing of the narratives of our histories and transforming what it means to live, to be, in other times and different spaces, both human and historical."[10]

Multiculturalism, an aspect of the second characteristic of postmodernism, needs to be mentioned next. Multiculturalism is connected to postmodernism and postcolonial theory through the philosophy of heterogeneity without hierarchy. "'Multiculturalism' is the opposite of ethnocentricity and rejects the vestiges of colonialism embodied in tendencies to regard art from other cultures either as 'primitive' or as the exotic products of "cultural others."[11] "According to the multicultural model, the best one can

> hope to do is try to understand how people within a given cultural
> tradition appreciated their own art. One cannot, from outside that
> tradition appreciate it as it is appreciated from within, but one can at least
> attempt not to impose one's own mode of appreciation on traditions to
> which it was alien."[12]

Prior to multiculturalism, at least in the United States, non-Europeans were not always considered part of "high" culture, given open access to it or invited to participate in it. Post-colonial theory and multiculturalism deconstruct modernist assumptions of aesthetic quality and hierarchical purity. The postmodern accepts the cross-fertilization implicit in multiculturalism and tries to expose the constructedness of dominant cultural discourses,

---

[8] Robert Atkins, *Artspeak: A Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements and Buzzwords, 1945 to the Present*, 2nd Ed. New York: Abbeville Press, 1997, 138.
[9] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1994, 245.
[10] Bhabha, *The Location*, 256.

6

recognizes the "cultural Other" as an object of consumption (fetishism) as well as a

difference to be lessened with acculturation. "Multiculturalism," is encouraged by "the

instant transmission of information and ideas across national borders made possible by

contemporary technology."[13] Opposing "cultural pluralism" does not mean that

characteristic two is invalidated because Arthur Danto views "pluralism" as art in a

"postnarrative" era in which anything is possible, aesthetic goodness is not the only

criterion of quality and no definition of art is static.[14]

The topics of postcolonial theory and multiculturalism, subcategories of both

postmodernism and identity politics brings us to a problem with my thesis, that other

historians and critics have already mentioned identity politics, so this factor is not entirely

new. Russell Bowman mentions "words as socio-political commentary" in his 1990 *Word

as Image* catalogue.[15] Prinz, Hapkemeyer and Weiermair also discuss identity politics in

their texts. However, by investigating the forces and issues contained in the politics of the

other, their influence on the use of text in art will be clear and their reiteration should not

be deemed unnecessary.

An aspect of the third characteristic of postmodernism that should be mentioned is the

relationship between artists and technology. Acknowledging that the Enlightenment

project of modernity is "unfinished" Jürgen Habermas noted: "from the time of the

dispute between the "Ancients and Moderns" the term "modern" has regularly expressed

the consciousness of an epoch that relates itself to the past of antiquity, in order to view

---

[11] Atkins, *Artspeak*, 122.

[12] Danto, *After the End*, 94.

[13] Atkins. *Artspeak*, 122.

[14] Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997, 198-199.

[15] Russell Bowman, *Word as Image*, Exhibition Catalogue, 15 June – 26 Aug. Milwaukee Art Museum, 1990, 130-133.

itself as the result of a transition from the old to the new."[16] Modernism's emphasis on

originality and innovation led avant-garde artists (Constructivists, Futurists and Dadaists)

earlier in this century to confidently embrace new technologies in their work.[17] But as

Walter Benjamin argues in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

(1935-36) "technical reproducibility" withers the "aura" of art, its uniqueness,

authenticity and authority. Modern technologies then, were not always beneficial to

artists and the public alike.

"The advance of technology is no longer a grand notion," given that the

Enlightenment's faith in science and reason led to two world wars and a holocaust instead

of progress and freedom.[18] However, now there are direct connections between artists and

technology given that electronic communications are a bigger part of people's lives.

Drawing upon the ideas of Lyotard – who believed that technological change would have

a major impact on knowledge, and that "the transmission and storage of information will

no longer depend on individuals but on computers," one begins to see why many

contemporary artists use the technology of the computer in their work.[19] This establishes

a connection between artists and technology and technology's ambiguous future. As

culture becomes daily more intertwined with electronic media, artists such as Nam June

Paik, Bruce Nauman, Lynn Hershman, Jenny Holzer are responding by incorporating

video, L. E. D. signs, neon and computers into their work.[20] Many contemporary artists

---

[16] In *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983, 4.
[17] Margot Lovejoy, Postmodern Currents: Art and Artists in the Age of Electronic Media, 2nd. ed. New Jersey: Simon & Schuster, 1997, 53.
[18] Foster, *The Return*, 205.
[19] Jean-Françios Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Trans. Bennington and Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, first edition 1979.
20 Frank Popper, *Art of the Electronic Age*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1993, 54-77.

use advanced technologies in their work but do not believe that technology can "save them." On the contrary, some artists use new technologies while simultaneously critiquing them.

Depending on their individual agenda, artists who use new technologies such as the artists mentioned above and others such as Laurie Anderson, Guillermo Gomez-Pena, Gary Hill and Gretchen Bender, may mix elements from "high" and "low" culture creating interactive or neo-conceptual art of many forms and varieties. New media art exemplifies the continuing bond between art and technology and of the growing importance of the media at the end of the twentieth century.

There is, however, a problem in considering the technology of the internet as a factor influencing the use of text. This problem is that the newness of internet technology may have prevented the four historians under consideration (Prinz 1991, Bowman 1990, Hapkemeyer and Weiermair 1996) from including online art in their studies. However, the internet is an extension of media culture which includes television, video, sound and text simultaneously, but the speed with which it has transformed perceptions of reality with its power to simulate has made it an alienating medium as well as a liberating one. The unfamiliarity and unpredictability of internet art might also be considered. As recently as 1997 Margot Lovejoy wrote "The widespread rapid development of Internet communication especially since 1994 is forcing cultural change. How will it affect art Can we control it?"[21] The newness and unpredictability of the internet are the reasons for this problem with my thesis, however despite any difficulties its growing complexity and ubiquity warrants attention.

---

[21]Margot Lovejoy *Postmodern Currents*, 213.

My thesis considers Simpson, Durham, Xu and Vesna as neo-avant-garde artists. Neo-avant-garde in this case is based upon the definition given by Hal Foster in *The Return of the Real*. His definition of the avant-garde is based upon two key works from which he derives his definition of the neo-avant-garde. Foster labels these two texts the "formalist avant-garde" according to Clement Greenberg and the "historical avant-garde" according to Peter Bürger. For Greenberg, in "The Avant-Garde and Kitsch," (1939/1961), "the aim of the avant-garde" was "not at all to sublate art into life but rather to purify art of life."[22] The Greenbergian emphasis on formalism delayed artists attempting "to destroy the institution of autonomous art in order to reconnect art and life," the definition of the historical avant-garde given by Peter Bürger in 1974.[23] To Bürger the historical avant-garde, were Marcel Duchamp, André Breton, Louis Aragon and John Heartfield. Bürger also identified the artists And Warhol and Daniel Spoerri as the neo-avant-garde, but claimed their project was "inauthentic" "since now the protest of the historical avant-garde against art as an institution is accepted as art."[24]

For Foster there have been two neo-avant-gardes. The first he defines as originating in the 1950's (Robert Rauschenberg and Alan Kaprow), and the second as beginning in the late 60's and early 70's (Marcel Broodthaers and Daniel Buren and others).[25] Foster agrees with Bürger that, both the historical and first neo-avant-gardes failed to destroy the institution of art, but differs from Burger in his view that "this failure enabled the

---

[22] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Art and Culture,* Boston: Beacon Press, 1961, 3-21.
[23] Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* 2nd ed. trans. Micheal Shaw, Mineapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974, 15- 34.
[24] Ibid., 53. All Subsequent references to Bürger are to this text.
[25] Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real,* 56-57.

deconstructive testing of this institution by the second neo-avant-garde."[26] Since then critiques from other areas such as feminism and post-colonial theory have tempered the once radical, macho neo-avant-garde. Now revolutionary language is avoided and new or neglected discourses are included. [27] According to Foster "the avant-garde is differentiated from formalist, modern art by its redefining of aesthetic categories and its testing of art's discursive rules and institutional regulations." [28] Further, he claims that "this general shift from formalist 'quality' to neo-avant-garde interest" began with pop and minimalism."[29] Last of all, Foster claims neo-avant-garde artists work with both formalist concerns and avant-garde "interest" in critical coordination.

Postmodernism, post-colonial theory, multiculturalism, and the use of new technologies in contemporary art, offer new tools with which to make critical judgements about art, values of progress, etc. Through these theories and new technologies, global perspectives are replacing Western perspectives. Lorna Simpson, Jimmie Durham, Xu Bing and Victori Vesna exemplify many of the characteristics of the postcolonial, multicultural version of postmodernism presented here. Each thinks critically about the future and may be considered a part of the second neo-avant-garde. In their work these four artists make it evident that identity politics and internet technology should be considered as new factors influencing the use of text.

[26]Ibid., 25.
[27] Of importance here are works such as Linda Nochlin's "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in Nochlin, *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays*, New York, 1988, 145-178., and Lucy Lippard's "Naming," in Lippard, *New Art in a Multicultural America*, New York: Pantheon, 1990.
[28]Foster, *The Return*, 58.
[29]
Ibid.

Chapter 2

THREE INTERPRETATIONS

In this chapter the critical analysis of three books/literature dealing with the use of

language in art from 1960-1990 will be conducted. The analysis will cover the works of

American scholars Jessica Prinz and Russell Bowman, and European scholars Andreas

Hapkemeyer and Peter Weiermair. Prinz and Bowman are referred to as the "Americans"

because both live and work in the United States and their texts were published here about

artists that live and work mostly in the U.S.. Hapkemeyer and Weiermair, on the other

hand, are curators who organized an exhibition that took place at the Museion in Bozen,

Italy and the Frankfurter Kunstverein in Frankfurt, Germany. Their exhibition catalogue

was published in Switzerland in Italian, English and German, therefore they are referred

to as the "Europeans." It may be more precise to call their viewpoint the "Italo-

Germanic" viewpoint, but the subject of concern here is not whether or not these art

historians are from Europe or America, but what differs or is similar between their

interpretation and those of Prinz and Bowman.

The analysis of these three interpretations has four parts. First, the most prevalent

reasons each identifies for the use of text in art will be explored. Second, the extent to

which each interpretation takes into account identity politics and internet technology as

related to the use of text in art will be identified. And third, why each does or does not

include the two new factors contributing to the use of text will be considered. In conclusion, additions to previous interpretations will be offered so that a critical synthesis may be achieved.

Beginning with the similarities between the three interpretations, the first is that the four historians are unanimous in their agreement that during the years 1960-1990 the blurring of boundaries separating disciplines such as: art, music, literature and theater led artists to include text in art. They also agree about two particular interests shared by the artists they consider. These are a return to narrativity as a motivation for the use of text in art and a return to the possibilities offered by the Duchampian "readymade." The latter is first attributed to the neo-dadaists but has since been taken up by neo-conceptual artists as well.[30] These historians also agree that the mass media, (television and printed matter) and these media's influence have been very influential in neo-conceptual artist's use of text. Because the media, where images often appear with text, control much of how society represents itself (the images and texts), its representations became a subject for these artists.[31] A fifth commonality shared by the four historians is their view of the relationship between Conceptual art and the artists they consider. As is well known, in Conceptual art ideas are art and the art material is language.[32] Artists using a conceptual approach may let words stand in for concepts or actions or art, and because of the ambiguity of language these words may have more than one meaning.

The sixth and last similarity that these historians agree about is that semiotics and the semiological writings of the French critic Roland Barthes in some way influence the

[30] Peter Weiermair's essay mentions Brandon Taylor's 1995 book *Avant-Garde and After* and specificall lists these two strategies. *Phototexttextphoto*, 33-35.
[31] Sandler, *Art of the Postmodern Era*,319-330.

artist's awareness of the fluid relationship between images and texts and the present

intangibility of meaning separating the two related concepts. Each scholar does not claim

that every artist considered is known to have read Barthes, but rather they mention that

many artists knew his writings. Andreas Hapkemeyer tries to differentiate between

image and text by quoting Micheal Titzmann who states, "As we know, the basic

> differences between the semiotic systems of images and texts consists in the
> lesser degree of coding of the primary signifiers [i.e. the simplest elements
> capable of bearing meaning] in the pictorial and the higher degree of coding
> in the linguistic form."[33]

While images are different from texts, they also have much in common. It is this

enigmatic relationship that continues to interest artists and to which Barthes refers when

he states "Today, at the level of mass communications, it appears that the linguistic

message is indeed present in every image: as title, caption, accompanying press article,

film dialogue, comic strip balloon."[34]

With this last shared similarity of semiotics and the semiological writings of Roland

Barthes we shall begin to assess the differences between the three interpretations.

Ironically, the first difference is that regarding the recognition that twentieth century

European critical and theoretical influence receives. Both Prinz and Bowman, in contrast

to Hapkemeyer and Weiermair, regard this century's influx of writing from Europe as

one of the biggest influences on artists who use text in art. Starting with the language

philosophy of Ferdinand Saussure and Ludwig Wittgenstein and continuing with the

ideas put forth by the French "poststructuralists," including Barthes, Foucault, Derrida,

---

[32] H. H. Arnason. *History of Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Photography.* 3rd. ed. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986, 562.

[33] Micheal Titzmann, "Theoretisch-methodologische Probleme einer Semiotik der Text-Bild-Relation," in Wolfgang Harms ed., *Text und Bild, Bild und Text, DFG-Symposiums,* 1988, Stuttgart: Metzler, 1990, 371, quoted in Andreas Hapkemeyer, *Phototexttextphoto,* 10.

Lyotard and Baudrillard, both Prinz and Bowman describe the impact of continental, theoretical discourse on American artists of the postmodern period. Hapkemeyer and Weiermair do not mention the influx of European writings into the United States nor do they claim that these writings influenced artists to use text in art.[35] The fact that Prinz and Bowman acknowledge the influence of European theory and Hapkemeyer and Weiermair do not leads me to question whether or not this should be considered an influence at all.

The second difference between the three texts concerns the types of art assessed. Based upon the work included in their studies, the type of art that Hapkemeyer, Weiermair and Bowman concentrate on is more object oriented than Prinz's. Of the four historians only Prinz writes about performance art and its use of language. Bowman, Weiermair and Hapkemeyer include documentation of the work of performance artists such as Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys, Gilbert & George and Alan Kaprow, but their discussions are limited to descriptions of the documentation accompanying the performances. Prinz, on the other hand, devotes almost an entire chapter to how traditional theater uses language and a full chapter to the work of the performance artist Laurie Anderson and her use of language, thus acknowledging the influence of an anti-object art mentality.

With reference to art theory and philosophy, a third difference between the three interpretations considered is that both Prinz, and Hapkemeyer and Weiermair refer to traditional enlightenment aesthetics, citing Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laokoon* (1755) for example. Both Prinz, and Hapkemeyer and Weiermair indicate that Lessing separated

---

[34] Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephan Heath, New York: Hill and Wang, 1977, 38.

the arts of painting and literature in this essay by noting space-time divisions while Bowman confines his essay to twentieth century references.[36] Prinz, and Hapkemeyer and Weiermair show that the use of text in art is more than just a twentieth-century phenomenon; they thus provide an historical framework to their interpretations.

These differences and similarities are significant because they show the range of interpretations possible even when each covers the same period and nearly the same artist. The critical, comparative analysis of these three interpretations also shows that there is not a clear dividing line between what and who should or should not be included. Performance artists, painters, photographers and computer artists all may use text in art. However, the close examination of each text allows one to identify the most prevalent reasons for the use of text in art, i.e. the six similarities between the various interpretations cited above. Two of the most prevalent reasons are the media and renewed interests in narrativity and the Duchampian tradition. These two reasons indicate that the two factors that this thesis seeks to have recognized are emerging as influences.

Next how each scholar analyzes identity politics and internet technology as related to the use of text will be discussed. Jessica Prinz's study while open to a dematerialized sensibility of art acknowledges the role of politics of the Other in one area only: that of feminism. Prinz does not focus on issues concerning other marginalized artists. She does, however, mention Laurie Anderson's "alterity" and her use of "spoken and written texts which help to shape an interdisciplinary art that is concerned with the limits and

---

[35] This influx of writings is something that Hal Foster also refers to as initiating the "textual" or "semiotic" turn in culture. This was a time, Foster claims, "when theoretical production became as important as artistic production" and that witnessed "the reformulation of the work of art as text." Foster, *Real, xiv-xviii.*
[36] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry,* Trans. E. C. Beasle . London: Longman. 1953. First ed. 1755.

possibilities language offers for representing the self, for communication, and for cultural identity and exchange."[37] Prinz also points out that it is significant that Anderson is a woman artist because she tells us that the artists she focuses on in her book are "the most blatant examples of what is now a cross-cultural phenomenon."[38] Her book is more concerned with philosophical understandings of language and its relationship to the art of the later twentieth century than with identity politics, but acknowledges the importance of multicultural viewpoints.

Hapkemeyer and Weiermair say almost nothing at all about the politics of identity in their exhibition catalogue. Their exhibition was concerned with the complex interrelationships between text and image. The two did, however, include several artists whose statements and work deal with the politics of identity and with confronting stereotypes. These include the gay, collaborative artists Gilbert & George, the feminist artists Louise Lawler, Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Karen Knorr, and Shirin Neshat and the performance/conceptual artist Joseph Beuys. Hapkemeyer and Weiermair also show an awareness of the politics of identity through their reference to the "narrating identity" tendency mentioned by Brandon Taylor in *Avant –Garde and After*.

Russell Bowman in his study, *Word as Image* directly addresses identity politics. One need only notice that his catalogue essay contains a section entitled "Words as Socio-Political Commentary." In this section he mentions artists such as Adrian Piper, Martha Rosler, Sue Coe, David Wojnarowicz, Hans Haacke, Jenny Holzer and Lorna Simpson, and discusses some of the political issues underlying their work. Quite correctly, he names women artists as "one of the strongest political 'voices' in the art

[37] Jessica Prinz. *Art Discourse/Discourse in Art*, New Brunswic :Rutgers University Press, 1991, 125.
[38] Ibid. 159.

world since 1970."[39] In this chapter Bowman explored a range of artists who draw attention to racism, sexism and other forms of prejudice based on bias, religion, ethnicity and economic standing.

Unfortunately, neither Bowman, Prinz, Hapkemeyer nor Weiermair included anything about the use of text in online art in their studies. The World Wide Web as a site for art was just assuming a place of importance for new media artists that it has today, although by and large it remains on the margins of the contemporary art market.[40]

In addition to the omission of identity politics and the technology of the internet, one other omission found while critically analyzing these three works is, regrettably, the failure of Bowman, and Hapkemeyer and Weiermair to consider the role of artist's books in relation to the use of text in art. Jessica Prinz discusses Joseph Kosuth's *Philosophical Investigations* and Robert Smithson's *Quasi-Infinities* both of which were book form "imagetext" artworks, but even Prinz did not consider the implications of the artist's book as an individual art form that was of high interest from 1960-1990. Many would agree that "Language is naturally associated with books, and artists have long accepted the illustrated book as an art form."[41] In fact, several recent exhibitions have considered the declining sovereignty of the book in the age of electronic media.[42]

Why did this group of authors- Prinz, Bowman, Hapkemeyer and Weiermar not mention these critical factors that contribute to the use of text in art? If one thinks about Prinz's recognition of the internet as a site for art, likewise with Bowman, Hapkemeyer

---

[39] Russell Bowman, *Word as Image,* 132.

[40] David Ross, Director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art , compares internet art to early video art. Reena Jana, "David Ross," *Flash Art,* 1999, 34.

[41] Deborah Wye, *Thinking Print: Books to Billboards, 1980-1995,* New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1996, 83.

[42] This refers to the exhibitions *Bound and Gagged: The Sculptural Book,* at Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, MI., 1998 and *A Book is Not a Book,* at the Bett Rymer Gallery, Chicago, IL., 1999.

and Weiermair, this shows the speed with which technological changes occur and the persistence of traditional definitions of art even among those most informed. Even for Prinz, Bowman, Hapkemeyer and Weiermair it was nearly impossible to predict the changes that would occur in the late eighties and the nineties. Prinz and Bowman mention multimedia art and the use of some electronic art technologies such as video and L.E.D. signs, but they do not, at any point, mention online art.

The critical examination of these texts was necessary to find out the differences and similarities between them and to evaluate what has been left out. This critical examination makes it clear how quickly things may change and how different these changes may be. These omissions have been identified so that they may be incorporated into future, critical interpretations of art that includes text. Viewers are not necessarily prepared/informed to interpret text art that deals with the social issues of identity politics or online art because these are all relatively new uses of text in art.

To conclude this chapter I will offer two suggestions to these previous interpretations of text art so that a critical synthesis may be achieved. The first is to recognize that identity politics and the possibilities offered by the technology of the internet contribute to the use of text in art. The second is to consider artist's books as a vital hybrid art form not to be forgotten or excluded for not fitting neatly in traditional categories of fine art.

In the chapters that follow the two new factors that, I am arguing, simultaneously contribute to the use of language in art from 1988-1999 will be presented more in depth. Each factor is related to the view of postmodernism given above and will be further substantiated by the work of the four artists to be discussed here.

Chapter 3

IDENTITY POLITICS

In this chapter the influence of identity politics will be clarified so that it may be

assessed as one of the factors contributing to the use of text in art, and thereby critically

synthesized with the three interpretations examined above. First, two art-making

tendencies, which the use of text in contemporary art can be divided into, will be

presented. These two tendencies should indicate how artists use text to address issues of

identity politics. Then, a discussion of identity politics follows, along with its four main

divisions, which are demonstrated by examples. Finally, the work of Lorna Simpson,

Jimmie Durham and Xu Bing will be considered to show through concrete examples how

identity politics contributes to the use of text in art.

The influence of the cultural "Other" on the use of text in the visual arts since 1988

may be divided into two related tendencies. These are based on growing ethnographic

and narrative trends in art making and are related because both build upon former

practices and both reflect growing interdisciplinarity as well as a general breakdown of

conceptual and national borders. Hal Foster identified the ethnographic tendency and

Brandon Taylor has discussed narrative interests. Both are based upon a shift by the neo-

avant-garde "from medium-specific elaborations to debate-specific projects" or "from

formalist 'quality' to neo-avant-garde interest."[43] Included in this shift was an urge to

recontextualize through the use of text (projected, written, or displayed electronically).

---

[43] Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," in *The Return of the Real,* 170-203. Unless otherwise indicated, all
subsequent Foster references are to this chapter.

This urge to recontextualize may mean juxtaposing seemingly unrelated images and texts or texts and environments in order to overturn traditional notions of originality or to undercut the endless circulation of images of the world from within.

The ethnographic tendency is based on the model of *the artist as ethnographer* given by Hal Foster in *The Return of the Real.* Here he proposes that this new paradigm is structurally similar to the old model of the author as producer coined by Walter Benjamin in 1934. In *"The Author as Producer"* Benjamin urges artists and intellectuals "to change the means of production," "to overthrow the barrier between writing and image." Specifically he counsels photographers "to give his/her pictures that caption which wrenches it from modish commerce and gives his/her pictures revolutionary use-value."[44] According to Foster "the subject of association has changed: it is no longer a subject defined in economic terms, now it is the cultural and/or ethnic other in whose name the committed artist most often struggles."[45]

Those who practice what Foster is talking about are ethnographer artists. The African-American artist Fred Wilson is one example. In 1992 at the Baltimore Museum of Contemporary Art, Wilson took on an ethnographer's role in a project entitled *Mining the Museum.* In this project Wilson investigated the collections of the museum and selected objects for exhibition. However, Wilson exhibited his objects with labels that exposed the institutional repression and racial oppression of the museum. Without the labels, which assumed the authority of the average exhibition label, Wilson's critique of the museum's "unbiased" representations of history would have been too ambiguous. His labels, the included text, made his point unavoidably lucid. For example, in a display

---

[44] Walter Benjamin. *Reflections,* ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott, New York: Harcourt Brace Javonovich, 1978, 220-38. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent Benjamin references are to this text.

labeled "Metalwork 1790-1880" he placed a pair of slave manacles next to a set of ornate silver goblets and teapots from about the same period.[46]

The ethnographic tendency is also based on "anthropology as the science of *alterity*, the discipline that takes culture as its object."[47] Artists aspire to this type of work in that theory and practice seemed to be intertwined. Projects in the ethnographic tendency may be site-specific, installation art, conceptual art or performances. They build upon practices found in Russian Constructivism (agitprop) and the Dada of Duchamp (readymades).

With various aspects of culture as their subject, Simpson, Durham, Xu and Vesna add text (captions) to their pictures to change their context and thus they too become author-producer-ethnographer artists.

A second tendency that the use of text can be divided into is the "narrating identity" trend. Brandon Taylor describes this trend as fulfilling an impulse, "In calling this

> impulse 'narrative,' I refer primarily to its embrace of imagery that originates in mass culture, takes its connotations to the fields of bodily experience, personal and racial identity, and by importing "meaning" directly occludes the strategies of the ready-made in most of its classic or recent forms. The most graphic contrast is with Duchampian art, which proposes a critique of ideas of art- institutional, authorial, or managerial – by means of devices of art alone."[48]

Artists "narrating identity" seek to add a tone that addresses identity through open signification, i.e. by adding handwriting and/or incorporating images from the mass media with captions. By using a narrative technique artists can openly address issues of race, gender and identity and escape a no-longer attractive aesthetic based on modernist principles of formalism and abstraction. According to Brandon Taylor "Such work, that

---

[45] Foster, *The Return of the Real,* 173.
[46] Ibid, 191.
[47] Ibid, 182.

22

elevates legible content over form and strategy, became the most general category of advanced art in the decade to 1995."[49]

Between 1988 and 1999 the utilization of the narrative and ethnographic tendencies defined above was part of a general shift in the roles of the artist and the purpose of art. This does not mean that artists no longer were interested in formalism and abstraction for some were and still are. However, ethnographer and storyteller artists, such as Mary Kelly and Lothar Baumgarten, blur distinctions between disciplinary areas by working on specific identity issues such as homelessness, sexuality and racial stereotyping. The political content of text art in the narrative and ethnographic tendencies is plain to see and helps to show how politics is combined with art and is in many cases inseparable from it. The four artists included in this thesis i.e. Simpson, Durham, Xu and Vesna work in either or both of these tendencies sometimes simultaneously.

Both of these trends in artmaking are used to address issues of identity. To do this artists often utilize both images and text, but what is identity politics and how is it understood for this thesis? The politics of identity, which could just as well be called the politics of the Other, is the term used to describe the complex social relations between people differing from one another and the struggle for power and leadership between them. The politics of identity can be divided into four basic categories based on gender, race and ethnicity, sex and class and are variable and may be addressed using either of the tendencies outlined above. The lines between each division are not definite and may prove to be merely historical constructs, but for the purposes of this thesis shall be

---

[48] Brandon Taylor, "Narrating Identity: the early 1990's" in *Avant-Garde and After*, 143.
[49] Ibid. 167.

adequate. In the following pages of this chapter, first, I will relate some of the history of

identity politics, then give explanations of the four divisions with examples and finally,

discuss the work of Lorna Simpson, Jimmie Durham and Xu Bing.

Although discourse on identity politics has been around since the time of the Greeks

and the Persian wars, "in the modern world, the cultural Other, provoked a crisis of

Western identity."[50] In this century as European colonialism slowed down or relinquished

authority those colonized began to speak out and question relations of power. Demanding

recognition instigated a crisis of Western identity. Writers such as the anthropologist

Claude Levi-Strauss and the philosopher/psychoanalyst Franz Fanon, both at work in the

fifties, wrote about the effects of colonization on those colonized and the colonizers, and

about the struggle of the cultural Other. Fanon wrote of the colonized native that seeks to

renew a national culture. Levi-Strauss wrote from the perspective of an anthropologist

first contact with a tribe in the Amazon. Later, the post-structuralist Jacques Derrida too,

in his theory of "binary opposites" was concerned with the human inclination to cast

those who are different as "Others." More recently the cultural historian Edward Said

wrote of "the Western artistic and scholarly portrayal of the non-West that organizes and

produces the Orient as a political reality that is opposite or Other."[51]

According to Arthur Danto, multiculturalism was on the ascendant in 1984, and was to

overtake the art world, in America at least, in epidemic proportions in the nineties.[52]

Danto is talking about a synonym for identity politics, which Robert Atkins explains in

Artspeak, "at the end of the 1980's, numerous American museums began to mount

---

[50] Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 1996, 217.
[51] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1978, 31-53.
[52] Danto, *After the End*, 94.

exhibitions organized on the basis of artist's ethnic, racial, and gender identities. (This

approach has since come to be known as *identity politics.*)"[53] While "identity politics" is

a recent buzzword, its concerns are more long standing. Today artists such as Lorna

Simpson, Jimmie Durham, Xu Bing and Victoria Vesna consider the implications of

"Otherness" from one of many possible perspectives. These artists therefore interpret and

comment on the hybridised nature of the contemporary, globalized world that includes

many elements of cultural diversity.

Not writing directly about identity politics, but rather about the contemporary avant-

garde, the art critic Arthur C. Danto describes the general public's reaction to the

socially-oriented art of the1993 Whitney Biennial as "the audience... felt itself the true

victim of all the artists proclaiming victimhood on their own behalf."[54] The reaction that

Danto describes approximates the reception of such art by those "carrying within their

collective minds a Biedermeier aesthetic". It also shows the general public's unfamiliarity

with the social issues addressed by these artists. Many artists in the period being

considered, 1988-1999, deal with the politics of identity because of the importance of

certain issues to them and at times in doing so disturbs a dominant culture that depends

on strict stereotypes.

"From perhaps the mid-1960s artists often found themselves increasingly involved in

political causes."[55] Beginning with the civil rights movement and coinciding with the

Vietnam War artists from marginalized groups challenged the existing standards of white,

patriarchal, heterosexual, culture. This era of social unrest was paralleled in the art world

---

[53] Atkins, *Artspeak*, 122.
[54] Arthur C. Danto. "Why Does Art Need to be Explained?: Hegel, Biedermeier, and the Intractably Avant-Garde,"in *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art's Meaning in Contemporary Society 1970's-1990's*,

25

by declining interests in purely formalist concerns and a renewed interest in representational imagery.[56] "Art was believed to be a means to social change" as "many artists became more concerned with social issues than aesthetic ones," specifically issues of identity politics.[57] Freedom from trying to fulfill any particular aesthetic agenda allowed marginalized artists to utilize techniques they felt communicated most effectively be they text, music, objects or images, traditional or non-traditional. The "cultural Other," because of their independence and experimentation are given credit for influencing an alternative to the "purity" of modernism, commonly referred to as "Greenberg's formalist position"[58]

The alternative work by marginalized artists "looked *beyond* the frame of the work of art to the social, economic, and political context within which art came into being and whose institutions it served."[59] Those considered "other" as well as those no longer interested in formalism and modernism began "to make clear the unique importance of questions of gender, sexual difference, race and the Third World."[60] Using images and texts in art is political and can be used to address either or all of the issues of identity politics.

The first category of identity politics is gender. For years feminist artists have been particularly concerned with the topic of gender because they have been marginalized on this basis by the patriarchal art world more than any other group throughout history. In

by Linda Weintraub, Arthur C. Danto and Thomas McEvilley, Litchfield, Conn.: Art Insights Publishers, 1996, 16.

[55] Ibid. 15.

[56] Russell Bowman. *Word as Image,* 130.

[57] Danto, *Art on the Edge,* 15.

[58] Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Art & Literature,* Paris, No. 4, Spring, 1963, 198-206.

[59] Irving Sandler. *Art of the Postmodern Era,* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998, 333.

this case, however, "marginalization" is not an accurate word because women make up approximately fifty-one percent of the world's population. Some feminist artists such as Nancy Spero, Judy Chicago and Mary Kelly rejected the aesthetic canon of modernism because it assigned an objectified role to women and they challenged men to reconceptualize aesthetic criteria.

Nancy Spero is a particularly pertinent example in this case. She uses images combined with text to critique the historical oppression of women. A committed feminist, Spero's philosophy prohibits the representation of men (only women). In works such as *Marduk* 1997, Spero presents stylized renderings of Greek and Egyptian goddesses. Spero accompanies the images with lines of text relating the killing and resurrection of the Babylonian mother goddess Tiamat, in order to present an alternative female identity.[61] Through similar "imagetext" art Spero has been campaigning against gender-based issues for years mostly unnoticed until recently.[62]

Through their revival of traditionally "craft" oriented art forms such as weaving and quilting, women artists raised questions about "high" and "low" art forms, as did male artists in other ways. By putting captions on these objects they also intuitively capitalized on the revolutionary use-value mentioned by W. Benjamin. The second generation of feminist artists, working in the eighties, (Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Jenny Holzer, Sherrie Levine, and others) was often concerned with addressing the representation of women in contemporary culture and the objectification of women throughout history. Many of the representations that these artists commented on were those found in the mass media, which often included both words and images. As a matter of fact, the "second

---

[60] Hal Foster, "For a Concept of the Political in Art," *Art in America*, Apr. 1984, 17-19.
[61] Roger Green, "Exhibit Raises Consciousness," *The Flint Journal*, 5 October 1997, sec. F, 4.

generation feminists maintained that human beings exist wholly in language rather than biology."[63] One of the most popular and effective examples of a second-generation feminist artist is the American artist Jenn Holzer whose "works use the structure of the mass media and aesthetics of the current milieu to smuggle messages into the public arena."[64] Always ambiguous but provocative, Holzer's works, such as *Kriegszustand (War Condition* 1996 exemplify the use of text in art to address aspects of issues of identity. *Kriegszustand*, an outdoor laser projection installation of the words "With You Inside Me Comes The Knowledge Of My Death" on a war memorial in Leipzig, Germany, also testifies to the increasing use of electronic text-based media for artistic purposes.[65]

In addition to feminism or gender based identity politics, issues such as race and ethnicity constitute a second area of emphasis in recent text based art. This category includes all artists from racial or ethnic minorities that are non-"Western" or "Third World." Native Americans are part of the race and ethnicity area of identity politics as are artists of Latino, Asian, Far and Middle Eastern descent among many others.

In the United States the largest group of artists who address the issue of race or ethnicity by using text is the group descended from the African diaspora. For these African-American artists the issue has not always been being considered an artist of great talent, before it was just being admitted into a museum or program of higher education.[66] Even as recently as 1990, artists of African ancestry, such as Alison Saar and Martin

---

[62] Ibid.

[63] Sandler, *Art of the Postmodern Era*, 359.

[64] Astrid Wege, *Art at the Turn of the Millenium*, eds. Burkhard Riemschneider and Uta Grosenick, Colonge: Taschen, 1999, 238.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson. *A History of African-American Artists: From 1792 to the Present*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1993, *xi-xvii*.

Puryear have been forced to deal with comparisons to European movements and artists, while African and African-American cultural references were ignored.[67] This is further complicated by the fact that African-American artists have been pressured since the twenties to work in a "primitive" style and as a result much of their work has been derogatorily labeled as "primitive."[68]

A noteworthy example of an African-American artist whose work has been labeled sophisticated "primitivism" may be found in the "graffiti" artist Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988). Basquiat was favored during the eighties by critics who identified him "as part of a continuum of contemporary American art with a genealogy traced through white males: Pollack, de Kooning, Rauschenberg, Twombly and so on to Andy Warhol."[69] Basquiat's vandalism-inspired graffiti art "tended to be packed with written words, signs, and symbols referring to his African and Hispanic identity, historical events and contemporary black figures with whom he identified."[70] Basquiat, like many of the artists considered here, dealt with themes of identity and pushed against the boundaries of conventional (white) artistic tastes before multiculturalism prescribed embracing diversity.[71] Basquiat often included text in his work and whether the text was explanatory or ambiguous or combined with Voodoo totems or skulls it helped "open art to the 'Other.'"[72]

---

[67] Micheal D. Harris, "Toward Object and Verb: History, Dualities, and the African-American Artist," *C Magazine*, Toronto, 1992: 13. For more documentation and statistical evidence of racism in the New York art apparatus Harris recommends, Howardina Pindell, "Art (World) & Racism," *Third Text*, ¾, spring/summer 1988, 157-90.

[68] Bearden, *History of African-American Artists*, 123.

[69] bell hooks. "Altars of Sacrifice: Re-Membering Basquiat," *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*, New York: The New Press, 1995, 35-48.

[70] Sandler. *Art of the Postmodern Era*, 266.

[71] Thomas McEvilley, "Royal Slumming: Jean-Michel Basquiat Here Below," *Artforum*, Nov. 1992, 95.

[72] Jean-Michel Ribettes, *Art at the Turn of the Millenium*, 62.

The third area that identity politics can be divided into is sex or sexual persuasion. This refers to gay and lesbian artists who are marginalized on the basis of their sexual orientation. When the AIDS epidemic started in the eighties, some gay and lesbian artists began to campaign against the disease and the government's lack of attention to its spread. Unashamed of using imagery or narrative, artists such as David Wojnarowicz, Felix Gonzales Torres, Luis Cruz Azaceta, Glenn Lignon and Keith Haring "mobilised sign-systems explicitly in order to comment directly on prominent issues of the day."[73] One can be sure that some gay and lesbian artists addressed other topics in their work, but in the eighties the AIDS crisis was a rallying point around which many gathered. One major art project held at the time stands out to exemplify the importance the AIDS epidemic. This is the *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt*, which was made for those who died of an AIDS-related illness. First shown in Washington during the 1987 National March for Gay and Lesbian Rights, this quilt is made of three by six-foot panels decorated with names, messages, pictures and mementos or bits of clothing. "Speaking many voices, existing in no single place, movable, expandable, made both privately and collectively, and able to remember an individual within an inclusive community, the quilt may have succeeded in bringing together the political and human functions of art."[74]

A fourth area of identity politics just emerging in artistic debate is that based on class. This concern focuses on economic differences and in most cases is based on a Marxist critique of capitalism in which art often is seen as a market commodity belonging to the upper classes. Somewhat altered in 1991 with the collapse of the U.S.S.R.. Artists using Marxist interpretations previously recognized that art was something used by those in

---

[73] Brandon Taylor, *The Avant-Garde and After: Rethinking Art Now*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1995, 148.

power to subjugate the weaker classes. Artists such as Hans Haacke, Martha Rosler and

Jenny Holzer all have commented on marginalization based on economic difference. In

performances, installations and photographs using texts, images and objects these artists

have criticized global corporations, the United States government and abuses of capitalist

power that increase social dilemmas. "Socially committed art was hardly new at the end

of the eighties," but what is not always spoken about is the use of text in such art.[75] One

socially committed artwork in which text seems to play an important part is *Le must de*

Rembrandts 1986 by the German born artist Hans Haacke.[76] Haacke's *Le must*

installation investigated and exposed the business sponsorship of the arts by the Cartier

Company and the Rembrandt Consortium of which it is a part. *Le must* consisted of black

signs with gold inscriptions of corporate logos, booklets of background information used

as a long caption, neoclassical pilasters with lists of names and short narratives, and

mural sized photographs all situated inside the concrete walls of what was a World War

II bunker. Yve-Alain Bois claims that "the usual typed pages that accompany Haacke's

pieces" are only "supplementary documentation..., not really part of the work" and that

Haacke's work "cannot fail to be correctly interpreted without them." However, the text

in Haacke's "imagetext" art has more importance than Bois admits. Why else would Bois

mention Haacke's "saturated information?" Haacke's socially committed art seeks to

expose the fourth area of identity politics- economic or class-based difference using text

in installations following the John Heartfield tradition of photo-montage.

   The number of artists worldwide whose work can be included in one of the four

divisions is large and cannot be repeated here. This total should indicate to some degree

---

[74] Toby Clark, *Art and Propaganda*, 160.
[75] Sandler, *Art of the Postmodern Era*, 550.

the potential found in such art and its popularity among artists, marginalized or not. It should also remind one, once again, of the words of Brandon Taylor who described work "that wishes to speak directly of issues..." and "that elevates legible content over form and strategy" as "the most general category of advanced art in the decade to 1995."[77] Haacke, Holzer, Basquiat and Wilson are four of the most well known examples of artists using texts in their work. They have been included here to help explain either of the four areas of identity politics contributing to the use of text in art.

An artist whose work includes text for reasons influenced by issues of identity and whose work incisively contains many elements of the updated, multicultural version of postmodernism presented in chapter one, is the African-American Lorna Simpson, (born 1960). She was chosen because her text art combines conceptualist and feminist concerns and typically deals with issues of racial and gender identity. Her neo-conceptual approach testifies to the ongoing importance of conceptual concerns to neo-avant-garde artists. Through her work Simpson also questions the political efficacy and limits of both language and imagery and seeks to deconstruct the codes that support prevailing power relationships.

Simpson's usual medium is photography, but hers is a photography that does not conform to the formal, modernist aesthetic of the hand-made print with its own "aura."[78] Simpson can be categorized with artists, such as Barbara Kruger or Louise Lawler, who used to be called "photoworks" artists because they were less concerned with print quality or the history of the medium than with simply being artists who just happened to

---

[76] Yve-Alain Bois, "The Antidote," *October*, # 39, 1986, 128-144.

[77] Brandon Taylor, *Avant-Garde*, 167.

use a camera. Simpson is known for her "standard strategy of repetition that she uses to inflate the image of a single figure into a collective persona that speaks to the simultaneous oppressions of gender and race."[79] Her images are spare and she typically presents her figures from behind or facing the camera with the head cropped out. Her photographs may be combined in series or alone, in color or black and white, but are often accompanied by text engraved on plastic or bronze mounts over, under, beside, or on the photographs.

With her background in documentary photography, Simpson has "concentrated on photography as a conveyor of enculturated codes."[80] However her photographs are onl one part of the work. The remainder consists of words that allow her to speak directly to specific issues. If one asks why Simpson uses language in her work and how she uses it, one begins to see that this is what identifies her as an ethnographer artist using a neo-conceptual approach. According to the cultural critic and art historian bell hooks Simpson's language: "...brings a threat to the fore. It invites us to consider the production of history as a cultural text, a narrative uncovering repressed or forgotten memory."[81] Simpson states that she includes her

"own text or her specific reading of the image to give the viewer something they might not interpret or surmise, due to their "educated" way of looking at images... and that she "would start to interject these things that the photograph would not speak of and that I felt needed to be revealed, but that couldn't be absorbed from

---

[78] Alan Artner, "Spare Power," *The Chicago Tribune*, August, 24th, 1992, D, 3.
[79] John Rapko, "The Feminine Masquerade: Works by Lorna Simpson at the Ansel Adams Center," *Artweek*, September 17, 1992, 20-21.
[80] Chris Bruce, "Navigating the Hall of Mirrors," in *After Art: Rethinking 150 Years of Photography*, Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, 1994, 21.
[81] bell hooks, "Facing Difference: The Black Female Body," in *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*, New York: The New Press, 1995, 94.

just looking at an image."[82]

Simpson uses phrases that are subversive because they undo their own seeming innocence. "Throughout her work, Simpson's intention is to redirect the viewer away from culturally conditioned signs of the body to the self-defined, authentic voice of the texts."[83] For example, the text that Simpson includes on or near a photograph may seem to directly refer to something about the photograph. Nonetheless, Simpson leaves the finding of meaning to the viewer, suggesting that it lies between image and text, and thus allows many interpretations. Because her ideas are more important than the media she uses to convey them Simpson is therefore in the continuum of generations of the Conceptual artists before her and she has been considered a neo-conceptual artist.

A work by Simpson titled *You're Fine*, 1988 (Figure 1) serves as a good example of the artist as ethnographer using text for identity-political reasons. This work consists of four Polaroid prints hung in a row so that together they form a single image of a reclining woman, seen from behind, wearing a white shift. Above the photographs affixed to the wall white letters spell the words ""You're Fine." Below the photographs similar letters spell out the words "You're Hired." To the left are gold plaques engraved with "physical exam," "height," and "electrocardiogram." To the right are two more gold plaques engraved "secretarial" and "position." The reclining posture recalls typical Venus or odalisque poses from the history of art and also the uncomfortable passivity required in a medical exam. Implied alienation and objectification are not too far behind. Each viewer

---

[82] Beryl J. Wright, *Lorna Simpson: For the Sake of the Viewer*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago: 1992, 8.
[83] Ibid. 9.

may see only a series of photographs which combined form the image of a reclining woman accompanied by ambiguous words, but something else produces a tension that cannot be entirely defined. Simpson, as the other artists included here, mines the gap between the signifier and the signified, a gap that results when neither word nor image is wed to the referent.[84] Her work disturbs some because of its insistent political content, but the issues it addresses- racial and gender identity need to be voiced. Because the figure in Simpson's work is anonymous it therefore refers to no one specifically and inverts the objectifying structures of the dominant gaze.

A second work by Simpson that fuses current theory with her practice is *Untitled (2 necklines)*, 1989 (Figure 2). Two circular black-and –white close ups of a woman's neck and shoulders with a vertical row of black plastic plaques in between bearing words corresponding to acts or objects that encircle, among them "lasso," noose," and "collar." Were it not for the red plaque below them with the phrase " feel the ground sliding from under you" the viewer would be left floundering between several possible interpretations. Kellie Jones sees in Simpson's allegories of "the archetypal Black woman" a "suave Innuendo of the Blues and the duality of use and meaning in the Black community (e.g. bad = good).[85]

Most recently Simpson has ventured into single and multiple-projection film installations and is still concerned with the same issues.[86] Her projections, such as *Interior/Exterior, Full/Empty*, 1997 are examples of the urge to recontextualize through the use of text because the projections in combination with the locations in which they

---

84 Foster, *The Return*, 86.
85 Kellie Jones, in *Lorna Simpson*, New York: Josh Baer Gallery, Oct. 1989.
86 Sarah J. Rogers, "Between Takes," in *Interior/Exterior, Full/Empty*, Lorna Simpson and Sarah J. Rogers, Columbus , Ohio: Wexner Center for the Arts, 1997, 9-16.

take place all contribute to the layers of meaning in the work.[87] The "shock" once found

by confronting unfamiliar images, media or experiences so typical of historical avant-

garde art, exists still in the work of neo-avant-garde artists, such as Simpson, only the

effect is no longer the same. Minimal in nature, Simpson's work invites the viewer to

produce whatever meaning he or she may find in Simpson's "imagetext" art. Because her

work cannot be satisfactorily interpreted without considering the identity politics issues

she investigates, Simpson makes evident the necessity of including the factor of identity

politics into interpretations of contemporary text art.

The second artist whose work serves as an example for this thesis is the Native

American sculptor Jimmie Durham, (born 1940). Durham was selected because his work

stands out as a poignant example of the postcolonial and because he uses text in art for

reasons based on the ethnicity area of identity politics. Durham is best known as an

assemblage sculptor, but is also a poet and performance artist. Throughout his work

Durham confronts the stereotypes of Native Americans in white culture. Because his

artwork stretches or blurs the boundaries of orthodox formalism he shares with the other

artists presented here this feature found by the European and American historians

mentioned above. Durham's work is also known for its Dada connotations something

also mentioned by the historians in chapter two. This is shown by his tendency to use

'found objects' and recontextualize them in conjunction with legible content.

Durham's work has certain ethnographic features, such as the tools by which cultures

define their identity, that give it an explicitly political content. These strategies also

locate Durham as an artist who utilizes an ethnographic strategy. Works such as *Red*

---

[87] Ibid.

Turtle, 1991 (Figure 3) "are meant to lead the observer to reflect on the misunderstandings

that are central to the confrontation between colonizer and colonized."[88] *Red Turtle* also

leads one to see that Durham's work needs to be understood in the context of two

paradoxes. The first is the invisibility of Indian history, a history of loss to which his

people, the Cherokee, were subjected and which was then forgotten under a wave of

official amnesia. The second is the image of 'the Indian' such as The Lone Ranger's

friend Tonto or Pocahontas that proliferated in American popular culture.[89] In order to

further aid his message Durham often utilizes found or appropriated texts, written b

"official" governmental sources or by authors such as William Shakespeare and the

anthropologist Frantz Fanon. In many cases the source of the texts Durham appropriates

is an important part of understanding the irony of his work.

His 1992 piece *I Forgot What I Was Going To Say* (Figure 4) includes the words "I

forgot what I was going to say" on a piece of paper sticking out from a piece of rounded

wood that separates a revolver from its trigger. [90] This is a small, rather unpretentious,

piece, however, the words which Durham wrote on a white piece of canvas, a sort of flag

of surrender, evoke questions about possession. "Whose gun was this? "What is the

history of this gun?" In the context of how Durham uses this gun, every viewer who is

descendant of those who colonized North America is confronted with questions in the

discourse of primitivism. The handwritten text cannot be attributed to anyone in

particular, however, its message seems to indicate that the joke, according to Durham, is

on himself. The images carved into the piece of wood separating the revolver from the

trigger are Native American mythological beings that are part of oral traditions passed

---

[88] Laura Mulvey, Dir Snauwert and Mark Alice Durant, *Jimmie Durham*, New York: Phaidon, 1995, 46.
[89] Ibid, 46-47.

from generation to generation before written language. Because of the implied narrative and ethnographic elements in his work, Durham utilizes both the "narrating identity" tendency as well as the "ethnographic" tendency.

According to Hal Foster Durham's hybrid works "mix ritualistic and found objects in a way that is preemptively auto-primitivist and wryly anti-categorical." [91] He should, therefore, be seen as an artist whose ethnographic work exemplifies the post-colonial effects of a clash of cultures and whose work is double-coded with modernist juxtapositions and personal cultural references. These characteristics also are part of the multicultural, postcolonial postmodernism that frames this thesis. The use of text in Durham's art is similar, not exclusively, to Simpson's and indirectly leads to his work' meaning. Only by thoughtfully contemplating the text, objects and images can one understand the ironies about culture/nature and civilization/savagery found in his work.

Another piece by Durham that makes use of the "found object" concept is *Untitled,* 1992 (Figure 5). *Untitled* is basically a found branch painted red accompanied by a piece of paper that Durham has written on. The letter gives some of the meaning of the piece away. For example it explains in simple language that Jimmie found this branch and proceeded to make a make a work of art out of it. After painting the branch red and sticking glass eyes on it. Durham gave up and authored the note explaining why. "Durham's art words are not Apollonian Logos, nor the whines of today's anti-logos graffitists, not text, not even Pop copy, but radical unravellings infected with the virus of incommensurability." [92]

---

[90] Ibid. 70.
[91] Foster. *The Return of the Real,* 199.
[92] Robert Mahoney, "Jimmie Durham: Art World Word Art," *Flash Art,* January, 1993,84.

Durham, unlike many other Native Americans, was not confined to a reservation, but instead roamed the world with the Navy. Later Durham was an art student, political activist and as Director of International Treaty Council of the American Indian Movement. Unable to return to a pre-colonization past, Native American artists such as Durham attempts to renegotiate identity in a complex and changing culture. His political agenda is motivated by his identity and though he has found success in some circles of the art world he continues to confront assumptions about Indians and refuses to capitulate to conventional Western art standards. Using a style he labels "neo-primitive neo-conceptualism," Durham tries to "deconstruct European hegemony and reconstruct it into a new "Indian" culture through automotive relics."[93]

A third artist whose work also indicates the importance of identity politics in text art is the Chinese émigré artist Xu Bing. Xu can be said to occupy the area of identity politics based on ethnicity or race. Furthermore, Xu's work also connects the two, new factors suggested for interpreting the use of text in art through his use of the technolog of the computer, of language, and the subject of identity politics as related to the cultural differences between East and West.

Xu Bing was born in 1955, educated in Beijing and became one of the important figures in the Chinese "New Wave" art movement. In 1990 in the wake of the Tianamen Square massacre he was forced to leave China.[94] Now living in New York he exhibits his work internationally. At thirty-nine years old, Xu first became known for his work *Tianshu* (*The Book of the Sky*). This work "is based on the three

---

[93] Lucy Lippard, "Jimmie Durham: Postmodernist "Savage," *Art in America,* February, 1993, 62-68, 55.

categories of Chinese writing: the sutra scroll, the book, and wall texts; however, in this work all three use the four thousand, unreadable, but aesthetically beautiful characters that the artist spent a year carving. This work defeats the viewer's expectations that the text can be read. It also touches on many contemporary issues: the futility of expression and the inability to communicate in modern times, as well as the deep-seated cultural and political disarray encountered in contemporary China."[95]

Tianshu- (The Book of the Sky) brings the East into contact with the West at its most divisive point, that of language; it questions cultural similarities and differences.

Ethnographic works by Xu Bing such as *Tianshu* reveal that language and culture are the subject of his art.

Xu is best known for his elaborate installations, that poetically merge sharp cultural criticism with traditional Chinese book craft. Through text-based installations Xu continues to "encircle history and politics with an imaginative web of cynicism, tradition and humor."[96] One work in particular by Xu Bing in which text plays an important role is *Cultural Animal: A Case Study of Transference* (Figure 6) an installation performance of 1996. This installation, which was videoed and reshown later at numerous galleries with two pigs on opposing walls, consisted of a live performance of two breeding pigs. As Lydia Yee the associate curator of contemporary art at the Bronx Museum of the Arts describes "Each pig will be carefully cleaned, groomed and have nonsensical words printed on their bodies in both fake English and Chinese. The pigs will be foraging for food and fornicating amongst newspapers, magazines and books."[97] For Xu this is "an experiment to provoke various responses and interpretations: the arbitrariness of all

---

[94] Laurel Reuter, *Into the Dark Sings the Nightingale: The work of Xu Bing*, Grand Forks, North Dakota: North Dakota Museum of Art, 1992, 1.

[95] Jonathan Goodman, "Bing Xu: 4,000 Characters in Search of Meaning," *Artnews*, September 1994, 99.

[96] Barbara McKenna, *Currents*, Feb. 22, 1999, University of California, Santa Cruz, http://www.ucsc.edu/oncampus/currents/98-99/02-22/chinese.htm.

cultural endeavor; a metaphor for the human condition: an illustration of cultural

imperialism; and the triumph of natural order over culture, or instinct over reason."[98]

Another work by Xu that exemplifies the tenets of my thesis is entitled *Introduction to*

New English Calligraphy, 1999 (Figure 7).[99] In this installation Xu invited

viewers/participants to learn the Square Word Calligraphy he teaches. Using traditional

Chinese brushstrokes Xu merges English letters with Chinese script. This work serves as

a bridge between East and West because it demystifies the Chinese language to non-

Chinese speakers. At first glance most of the words of Square Word Calligraphy appear

to be Chinese writing, but can be easily deciphered as English words. In a project that

stems from Square Word Calligraphy Xu has developed a computer version called *Nin*

Gui Xing (Your Surname Please), an Interactive Language Project, 1999 located on the

website of the Asia Society [100] Here viewers become collaborators in Xu's project,

inputing their names, which are then, transformed into "pseudo-Chinese characters" a

theory catches up with practice. One can also see the gap between words and meanings

opening up as the language that identifies the Chinese people merges with English.

I have established through the analysis of these representative artists that identity

politics are a factor that influences the use of text in the art from 1988- 1999 and that this

should be critically synthesized with the interpretations given in chapter two.

[97] Lydia Yee, review of *Cultural Animal: A Case Study of Transference,* by Xu Bing, accessed March, 29th,
1999, available from http://www.imageseries.com/art-review.htm.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ethan Cohen. "Xu Bing," *Asian Art Newspaper,* January, 1999, 6-7.

Chapter 4

A REALM WHERE ART AND INFORMATION MEET

In this chapter the influence of internet technology on the inclusion of text in art from 1988 - 1999 will be clarified so that this issue can be synthesized with interpretations b Bowman, Prinz, Hapkemeyer and Weiermair. Crucial to an understanding of this factor is a consideration of the mass media's influence on artists and society. Following assessment of the effects of media on society during the past thirty years through the comments of several media theorists the influence of the media on artists will be shown. Next, the relationship between art, technology and the media will be discussed. This will then be followed by a description of the characteristics of web/net art. Concluding this chapter will be a look at the relationship between web/net art and identity politics in the art of Victoria Vesna.

As discussed previously, the four theorists/scholars discussed here concur that the artists' use of text during the years 1960-1990 reveals the influence of the media. One characteristic of the view of postmodernism used here is disillusionment with technological progress coupled with an irresistible fascination with it. However, in the first part of this chapter the effects that the media has had on society generally in the past thirty years will be considered. This will then be connected by taking into account the

---

[100] Asian Society, "Work in Progress," available from
http://www.asiasociety.org/arts/insideout/workinprog.html, accessed April 13, 1999.

continuing relationship between art and technology to the development of the internet as a site for on-line art.[101]

In the past three decades both media theorists and artists recognized that the media is influencing others to believe in its alternate reality. In a chapter called "Media Art" in *Art of the Postmodern Era* (1998) Irving Sandler writes about the increasing influence of the mass media on the lives of most Americans and some artists' responses to this. One pertinent segment reads, "The overwhelming number

> of Americans born after 1945 had been weaned on the mass media,
> particularly television. They sat for hours on end every day in front of
> the tube, their consciousness permeated by its programming- and its
> commercials. So prevalent had the mass media become that many artists
> felt that they had come to constitute their essential experience, if not
> reality itself."[102]

The reality defining and transforming aspects of the media that Sandler describes were, however, predicted in the sixties by the media theorists Guy Debord and Marshall McLuhan. Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) had fatalistically predicted that "capitalism had evolved and instituted such powerful mechanisms for manipulating consciousness that the masses had been transformed into passive consumers, in thrall to an all-embracing "spectacle" of advertising and the media."[103] McLuhan, on the other hand, in *Understanding Media* (1964) was more optimistic and saw the media as "an extension of man." McLuhan believed that television had the ability to enmesh the entire human community into what he called "one vast electronic, global village."[104]

---

[101] The World Wide Web is, according to Robert Atkins, a component of the internet. Robert Atkins, *Artspeak*, 135.

[102] Irving Sandler, "Media Art," *Art of the Postmodern Era*, 320.

[103] Myriam D. Maayan, "From Aesthetic to Political Vangaurd: The Situationist International, 1957-68," *Arts Magazine*, Jan. 1989, 51.

[104] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964, 60.

Debord's and McLuhan's views are two of the most widely acclaimed. However, since then others such as the French media theorist Jean   Baudrillard have also commented on the all-too-powerful effects of the media. Baudrillard believed that as computers, television and other electronic media increasingly dominated society, the mass media profoundly affected Western culture. In 1988 he wrote: "that people are mediated by the language of the media where the established social order represents itself," and that "we should passively surrender to the flow of media images in an ecstasy of communication."[105] In a way, Baudrillard's, Debord's and McLuhan's predictions have now come true as we have become wired to spectacular events that can be experienced globally on the World Wide Web.

In the nineties, theories about the effects of the media continue to be formulated. Leonard Schlain the author of *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The Conflict Between Word and Image* (1998) postulated on the effects of television on culture. He claimed that, "The fusing of photography and electromagnetism is proving to be of the same magnitude as the discovery of agriculture, writing and print."[106] He also alleged that, "Television promotes multicultural tribalism and subverts nationalism."[107] This undoubtedly refers to solidarity based on similar television viewing experiences, which cannot be confined to national borders. Television programs such as CNN news, Dallas or Dynasty, which can be seen around the world, serve as examples.

---

[105] Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, Trans. Bernard and Caroline Schutze, New York: Semiotext(e), 1988.
[106] Schlain, Leonard, *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The Conflict Between Word and Image*, New York: Viking Putnam, 1998, 407-429.
[107] Ibid.

Since the sixties artists have made works that comment directly on the media. For the Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist and others Pop artists it was the popular culture of advertising that inspired their work, some criticized its representations, some glorified them. In the seventies video artists criticized the mainstream media which all but banned their work.[108] During the 1980's, artists such as Barbara Kruger and Richard Prince examined the overload of images in the media by appropriating imagery and/or the technology from the mass media. It was then that it began to be recognized that "what we see on television is based on what audiences want to watch, and what the people who control and sponsor television believe needs to be created and broadcast in order to maximize profit."[109]

The relation between the media and art has to do with the redefined relation between art and technology. Many contemporary artists use new computer-based technologies for art making. Artists value these technologies because they allow communication with larger numbers of people more than traditional media like painting, sculpture and drawin . The influence of the media continues to interest some theorists and artists, as does the use of new technologies. The growth of technology-based art is part of the shift in the past thirty years from the medium-specific modernist tradition of the artist as painter, sculptor or printmaker to a neo-avant-garde understanding that may involve other areas of endeavor. This shift is based on interest rather than quality. Artists, such as Gretchen Bender, who want to critically examine the media and are interested in using

---

[108] Frank Popper, *Art of the Electronic Age*, 179.
[109] Herbert I. Schiller, "Media, Technology, and the Market: The Interacting Dynamic," in *Culture on the Brink: Ideologies of Technology*, eds. Gretchen Bender and Timothy Druckery, Seattle: Bay Press, 1994, 44.

new media technologies, create works in which the computer controls some aspect of the other media used. An example of one such work by Bender is *Total Recall* 1987, a computer controlled, video work. [110] This installation consists of twenty-four monitors, three film screens and eight video channels whose simultaneous images overwhelm the viewer with information in a way only possible through the emerging digital, technolog of the computer, although the television plays a crucial part as well.

The digital technology of the internet represents a manifest convergence of television, telecommunications technologies and interactive computer technologies. Art projects on the internet, in 1999, are an extension of the digital media and have similarities to earlier multimedia works by artists such as Laurie Anderson, Grahame Weinbren and Jeffery Shaw. Anderson's multimedia performances such as *United States*, 1984 merged high art and popular culture using spoken, projected and written texts. Weinbren's computer controlled videodisc project *Erlkonig* 1987 was one of the earliest, interactive videodiscs that allowed the user/viewer to touch the screen to direct the flow of the video's sound texts and images.[111] Shaw, on the other hand, created an interactive computer/video installation *The Legible City*, 1990 that allowed the user to take an imaginary bicycle ride through an urban architecture of words and sentences.[112] Many artists such as Bender, Shaw, Weinbren, and Anderson comment on the presence and effects of the media in their lives and the lives of others by creating media conscious

---

[110] Ibid. 179.
[111] David Reisman, "Telescreen as Text: Interactive videodisc Now," *Artscribe International*, May, 1988, 66-70.
[112] Frank Popper, *Art of the Electronic Age*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1993, 110-111.

work and by putting electronic media to work in their art. Their use of electronic, computer-based, media technologies can be seen as a precursor for internet/web art.

In its initial stages online artworks often took advantage of the information storage and transmission capabilities of the internet thereby giving early on-line art an exceptionally neo-conceptual appearance.[113] Only in the past few years have artists begun to understand—as technology has advanced— what may be done when text, images and sounds are combined on multiple, randomly generated screens. Internet/web art situates us "in a realm where art and information meet."[114] I am proposing that the technology of the internet should be included as a factor contributing text in contemporary art. It should be noted though that already in the brief history of internet/web art some art historians have mentioned opposing opinions. For example, David Reisman, who has written about interactive video art, claims that, "a number of artists may be getting interested in the artistic possibilities of the internet through a longer-standing use of text in art, rather than the other way around."[115] Surely this debate will continue.

In the past decade the internet has grown and expanded to include the World Wide Web and in doing so has become a possible site for art. In this brief period it has been used by artists in ways that have never been possible before, so that now they are creating "art" the likes of which no one has ever experienced. But what are the characteristics of internet art? Dubbed "net" or "web" art, this art appears online, but may have an object based component as well, continues many of the accomplishments of earlier artists, expands accepted definitions of art and comments on contemporary issues. Several other characteristics of web/net art are: a virtual erasure of geographical borders allowed

---

[113] Atkins, *Artspeak*, 137.
[114] Lovejoy *Postmodern Currents*, 213.

through worldwide transmission, utilization of texts, sound, images and video (hypermedia) on more than one screen, and interactivity that depends on the input of a participant for its progress.[116] In online art "the finished work of art gives way to one that is never finished."[117] Online art is ethereal art form existing only as digital data in a memory bank. Such projects exist one day and may be gone the next. Art online produces new aesthetic experiences and political interventions because through it artists can reach an audience of multicultural viewers around the world. Internet/web artworks are "hybrid art," and are "liminal works that intersect or balance precariously between disciplinary modes" thus aptly fitting Jessica Prinz's definition for "textual art" updated by two new factors [118] Last of all, internet art is experience oriented and requires a dematerialized concept of art similar to that advocated by the conceptual artists and performance artists. However, internet/web art, like Performance art and Conceptual art, is still in its infancy. It is a new media and descriptive parameters should not be set, nor are they trying to be set here.

The addition of internet art to the range of media available to artists gives them more opportunities to have their views heard. Communication is an intentional part of internet art and is one of the primary reasons why web/net art includes text. Artists want to communicate with the work they do. Web/net art projects combine texts, images, sound, and video to convincingly present an artist's message. Better communication (faster and to more people simultaneously) is only one of the possibilities offered by the technolog of the internet to artists who choose to use text in web/net art projects rather than

---

[115] David Reisman, interview by author, e-mail correspondence, April 21, 1999.

[116] Atkins, *Artspeak*, 135-137.

[117] Regina Cromwell, Interactive Art and the Videogame: Separating the Siblings, Camerawork, Spring, 1993, 10-13.

traditional art forms. Granted all art is about communication, but the urgency to communicate is conveyed through the medium used, electronic telecommunications technologies.

One of the most important characteristics of web art and the interactivity of web art in general is its reliance on text (hypertext) as an essential operative element. Hyperlinks do not have to be text, but hypertext markup language (html), the computer language that composes all online websites is a language of numbers and letters, not images. In a realm where art and information meet being in cyberspace is "closer to reading a book than to watching T.V.. Much of what we look for in the culture of the book can actually be found in the new culture of the screen."[119] The reason for this is that net/web art often includes text that takes the form of what is called "hypertext." Technological "progress" and theories that alter the authority of the author led to the invention of hypertext. George Landow, the author of *Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, (1992) states that "hypertext represents the convergence of technolog and literary theory by entwining the roles of the reader and the writer and allowing the reader to choose his or her way through a text." [120] Primarily occupying the place of instructions, titles and categories hypertext moves the net art experience along by allowing the user to choose between links connected to other text.

Interactivity through the use of hypertext, is one of the key differences between on-line art and traditional art. Many contemporary artists using new interactive technologies

---

[118] Prinz, *Art Discourse/Discourse in Art*, 8.
[119] "What We Are Doing On-line," *Harper Magazine*, "Forum," August, 1995, quoted in Margot Lovejoy *Postmodern Currents: Art and Artists in the Age of Electronic Media*, 2nd ed., New Jersey: Simon & Schuster, 1997, 213.

49

claim that the content of art online is found in the work's interactivity even stating that "each work only really exists when the spectator becomes a participant and interacts with it."[121] The notion that a viewer's interactivity is part of the essence of an artwork is related to the Minimal art movement's concern with audience involvement. Interactivity also situates net/web art in the genre of time-based arts such as video, performance and music. The possibility of interactivity offered by the technology of the internet is one of the main reasons why artists use text in internet/web art.

One of the other differences between online art and traditional art is that in most interactive art online, the artist is not in control or pretending to control the art experience through a structured hierarchy.[122] Each viewer/participant by clicking on various "hot" spots or words is linked to another screen, animation, video, sound or music fragment where he or she must then again complete the same process. "With the rise of the personal computer, the status of the text in society changed and so did the role of writing in the electronic age."[123] Artists of interactive net/web art projects have become more than just producers of art objects, now they create art that is experiential and collaborative with the viewer or completed by the viewer.

An example of an online art project that uses interactivity, is experiential and collaborative with the viewer is *Dream Screens*, 1996 by Susan Hiller. *Dream Screens* begins by offering the user/viewer a hypertext menu of six different language choices with which to hear the accompanying sound (or text). "The sound (or text) accompanying *Dream Screens* is ambiguous, part recollections, part dream images, part catalogue of

---

[120] George P. Landow *Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, 27.

[121] Regina Cromwell, "Interactive Art and the Videogame: Separating the Siblings," 10-13.

[122] Reena Jana, *Flash Art*, 35.

50

collective historical documents (the artist remembering scenes from films that have the word "dream" in their title, and recounting them in chronological order). [124] This project also has a bulletin board for user's comments, interviews with the artist, a list of books on dreams, an index of the color's names that the viewer sees after clicking on their language choice. The viewer of *Dream Screens* may stay at this project as long as s/he wishes and may follow any path desired.

The fact that the user is offered non-linear and varied pathways at every point in a hypertext document or screen is also the basis of one specific point about the technology of the internet as related to text in art. This concerns the way that "the line between one's identity as a reader or writer can shift" as s/he navigates his/her way through the non-sequential writing. [125] Internet/web art projects often require the input of the user/viewer for their completion. For example, Susan Hiller's *Dream Screens* requires the participant/viewer to select a language of their choice. *Dream Screens* does not select one for the user and without the choice of the participant/user the art cannot continue.

It could also be argued that the text in online art is virtually invisible. In online art the "text" is something that writer or reader must acknowledge due to the fact that text and hypertext are present in most net/web art. Usually the use of text in net/web art is not meant to be an issue although obviously its creator and users acknowledge the text and hypertext, but what does it mean when the identity of the reader, writer and user are changed? Artists, who use the electronic, telecommunications technologies of the digital media want to communicate. They want to make interactive art that gives viewers new

[123] Geert Lovnik, "From Speculative Media Theory to Net Criticism," *Mute: Digital Art Critique*, New Contemporaries Insert 1997, 1.
[124] Susan Hiller, *Dream Screens,* web art project on the DIA Center for the Arts website, available from http://www.diacenter.org/hiller/index.html, accessed August 25, 1999.

experiences and has the potential for the simultaneous, rapid transmission of information, in the form of images, sound and text to all sites on the internet/World Wide Web. The want to make this information available to anonymous users regardless of the viewer's personal identity. To do this artists now may openly show their literary skills along with traditional and avant-garde, artistic ones by allowing viewers/users as authors and readers to become interactive producers.[126]

Now that the role of the media and the characteristics of web/net art are better understood and the use of text and hypertext in internet art has been considered, the relation between online art and identity politics is next. The art of Victoria Vesna will be discussed here to show the influence of identity politics and the technology of the internet on the use of text. First we will look at the relationship between web/net art and identity politics. Then we will closely look at one of the latest projects by Vesna.

The emergence of the technology of the internet as a site for art and its use of language is more complicated than the issue of identity politics because the issues of identity politics are not necessarily eliminated through the use of this new technology. According to K. D. Davis "Identity politics has found its latest playing field on the net, as gender and sex are among its most active and vibrant subject nodes."[127] "Identity is the first thing you create when you log on to a computer service. By defining yourself in

[125] Reena Jana, "David Ross: Director, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art," *Flash Art*, January/February, 1999, 34.
[126] Lovejoy *Postmodern Currents*, 235.
[127] K. D. Davis, "Spatial Deceptions: Art and Gender on the Net," *World Art*, 1995, 11.

some way, whether through a name, a personal profile, an icon, or a mask, you also

define your audience, space and territory."[128]

Art online does eliminate almost all distinctions of identity because when one

experiences an online artwork one has no certain way of knowing the identity of the artist

or artists who created the site unless this information is given. One of the only ways that

users of an on-line art project might not be as "equal" as other users is through the

technological limitations of their computer system. The scholar Olu Oguibe, succinctly

describes this situation, "In my thinking, the "other" on the Net is not the problem. The

problem is the new "other" that the Net has created, the "other" who cannot simply

connect."[129]

The possibilities remain wide open, but to some web/net art can be seen as somewhat

controversial given the elitist connotations surrounding the access to high technology and

the "neo-colonization" of cyberspace. Cybernetic technologies do for the most part

eliminate geographical, gender and racial distinctions, but these benefits in no way

advocate blind faith in technological "progress."

Between the multitude of texts, images and sounds of the internet, which becomes

more and more dominated by pornography and corporate retail sites everyday, there is

still space for art. Because of the advantages of faster and more communication we can

be almost certain that more artists will decide to venture into the brave new world of the

digital matrix known as the internet and add to the use of text and hypertext. The inability

of users to identify the art sites from the normal general interest, academic and business

sites will also only add to the complexity of online art. Recently too, digital art-specific

---

[128] Lynne Hershman Leeson, "Romancing the Anti-body: Lust and Longing in (Cyber)space," in *Clicking In: Hot Links to a Digital Culture,* ed. Lynne Hershman Leeson, 325.

museums have surfaced, such as Germany's ZKM (Center for Art and Media) and

Tokyo's ICC.[130] These museums attest to the growing interest in media and online art.

The claims that this thesis makes regarding identity politics and internet technolog

as factors contributing to text art are shown in the work of the American artist Victoria

Vesna, (born 1959). Originally from Washington D.C., Vesna was chosen to be included

in this group of four text art artists because she is female, she is a contemporary artist, a

curator, an educator, a student and her work is primarily computer based. Vesna's work

may be categorized with other artists such as Laurie Anderson, Guillermo Gomez Pena,

and Esther Parada, who through their art continue to question cultural and geographical

boundaries. Because Vesna's work has culture as one of its subjects and because it uses

stories and scenarios, it therefore utilizes both ethnographic and narrating identity

tendencies.

One of Victori Vesna's most recent interactive, internet art projects is *Bodies*

INCorporated, 1996 (Figure 8). To some people this online artwork may not appear to be

an artwork at all, however its creators/maintainers claim that it is. This is compliant with

the notion that "Pluralism in art entails that anything can be art. "[131] *Bodies INCorporated*

was created in 1996 in collaboration with Robert Nideffer, Kenneth Fields and others and

"is devised to facilitate exploration into the social psychology of group dynamics,

actualized in corporate structure."[132] This project is designed to allow users "to build out

---

[129] Olu Oguibe, "Digital Other: The Virtual Third World," *Flash Art*, May June 1999, 63.
[130] Reena Jana, "David Ross: Director, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art," *Flash Art*, January February 1999, 34-35.
[131] Arthur C. Danto, "Interview," *The New Art Examiner*, February, 1999, 27.
[132] "Biography of Victoria Vesna," *Eighth International Symposium on Electronic Art Program Guide*, Chicago, September 1997, 123.

bodies in three-dimensional space what were previously bodies generated as text-only."[133]

Before each user has the opportunity of building out a body he or she must first agree to recognize and abide by various copyright restrictions, legal disclaimers, and limits of liability—including liability for disappointment in the outcome of the body that one constructs. In contrast to most websites, where the average user only clicks on "ok" or "yes" or "no," on this site users must first fill out a form that was derived from the Official Disney website [134] After the proper agreements have been taken care of the users may then begin assembling their body out of twelve synthetic and natural materials by buying shares with which to obtain body parts. Each user is free to choose skin color, sex or size although building a body that is not a tall, slim, decidedly Euro-American ideal requires more shares and expertise.[135] This website's specific preference for idealized humans is unfortunately somewhat racist and arrogant.

Once a body is assembled it then can be translated from text into three-dimensional images visible to other users. Each user of the *Bodies INCorporated* website gains a new identity formed around the body he or she has created which is their personal property and can be downloaded on their own computer. Part of the *Bodies INCorporated* community that is also planned into this site is that upon deciding to end the life of their body participants must bury it where other users can visit it. Bodies as part of a corporate structure reveal the criticisms of corporate culture implicit in this site. A web/net art project that allows users to create an alternate identity as visual and textual information

---

[133] Gonzales Jennifer, "Appended Subjects and Hybrid Incorporations: *Bodies INCorporated*," available from http://www.ucsc.edu/ accessed 9 April,1999, 1.

reveals how personal identity in the digital age becomes more and more fragmented into a series of windows on a screen.

Vesna considers herself "a nomad artist and a world citizen" and continues to exhibit her project at museums around the world where visitors, normally without access to a computer, can see the project and become familiar with it.[136] At such locations, the bodies displayed on the computer at the museum will only be those belonging to residents of that particular location, who are also invited to the exhibition's opening.[137]

In Vesna's web art the text is invisible/visible, but of crucial operational importance, as discussed above. This is different than the text in Xu Bing's *Square Word Calligraphy* on-line project where text is central. Both projects are different and yet both utilize the same technology of the internet. Both projects also use text, but Xu uses text and his work is about text while Vesna's uses text, but is about something else. The meaning of each as in all works considered is left open to interpretation.

---

[134] Tilman Baumgaertel, "Netzkunst: Philosophische Koerper," *Spiegel On-Line*, Kultur Extra Archiv: Kunst, available from http://www.spiegel.de/kultarc/kunst/aktuell/vesna.html, Internet; accessed April 9 1999.
[135] Gonzales, Jennifer. "Appended Subjects," 3.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

The four artists investigated here, Simpson, Durham, Bing and Vesna, reveal the diversity of artistic concerns accessible. They also utilize a visual language that is transnational and cross-cultural. As in Jessica Prinz's *Art Discourse/Discourse in Art* the number of artists working with similar agendas is large and the artists selected here are only "blatant examples of a cross-cultural phenomenon." Together they show the need to include identity politics and the technology of the internet as factors contributing to text art in the years 1988-1999.

The four artists above do not necessarily work only in the format discussed. Many at times work in other media. All four artists situate themselves within the realm of the neo-avant-garde by including text in visual art and addressing issues of identity politics among other things. Their choice to include text in art situates them within a history of other artists who also include text. This is a choice that should not be simply overlooked for it is not simply a binary either/or decision. Including text differs from not including it. Simpson, Durham, Xu and Vesna admittedly address other issues of importance, however, text is text and unless one is addressing the slipperiness of meaning between text and images, it is obvious that texts are used as more than just signifiers. In this type of art the text present has importance to the artist as text. Therefore to omit discussion of the importance of the legible content in the art of these artists would be similar to omitting the importance of color, iconography, or interactivity etc. in works without

---

[136] Victoria Vesna, personal e-mail interview, April, 1999.
137Baumgaertel, Tilman, *Netzkunst*, 3.

visible or audible text. Critical thinking should be applied to this type of work, not to detract from the other important issues it is concerned with that continue to need more attention than they are given, but instead to learn from it, to see what exists in addition to what is openly at stake. In the end all the factors given should be considered as having an influence on the artists who create text art, although prioritization cannot be given concretely.

From this point on, when encountering art that includes text one should remember to combine the two new factors with previous interpretations so that a critical synthesis may be achieved. One should recognize that identity politics and the technology of the internet contribute to the use of text in art. Regarding identity politics this may mean the use of text in art to address one, several or all of the four areas of identity politics presented. Once the theme of identity politics in a work of art is recognized and the use of text is also noticed the specific relation of the legible material to any images or objects present may then be differentiated according to whether or not it uses the "ethnographic" or "narrating identity" tendency. If one is experiencing an online artwork one may identif the differences between the traditional work of art and the work of art "on-line." These differences then lead to the possibilities offered by the technology of the internet: interactivity, better (faster and more) communication, and a shifting identity between viewer and creator of art. These possibilities are what influence artists to use text and hypertext in on-line art.

With globalization artist's views of what the purposes of art are have changed and continue to change. Artists now think of themselves as cultural workers responsible for the positive transformation of society. "There is not any clear-cut definition of the artist's

role."[138] Without the proposed consideration of the impact of technology and the cultural

Other interpretations of text art would be similar to the three (Prinz's, Bowman's, and

Hapkemeyer's and Weiermair's) given in chapter two.

New theoretical perspectives have decreased the distinctions between text and images

and contributed to interpretive interdisciplinarity. The use of text and images can be used

to promote political agendas and the use of text and images is political. The positive

benefits of internet technology do not eliminate or correct the issues that are at the basis

of the politics of identity, but as may be progressively seen in the work of each artist

discussed the politics of identity are converging with online web art. Now both of these

factors simultaneously and independently influence the use of text in contemporary art.

The art and artists discussed here all operate with the three characteristics of

postmodernism: an end of metanarratives, a heterogeneity without hierarchy, and a

challenging of the modern notion of originality in the background of their work. All four

are acquainted with the ubiquity of the mass media and its manipulative place in culture

at the end of the twentieth century. The validity of the art of Simpson, Durham, Bing and

Vesna as with most art of the recent past must continue to be examined before a critical

distance can be achieved. Their use of text is only one aspect of such an examination.

However, this study of previous interpretations of the use of text in art from 1960-1990

and the close study of the use of text by these four artists now forms part of any future

interpretations of art that includes text. The message is in the box.

---

[138] Lovejo . *Postmodern Currents*, 266.

APPENDIX

Figure 1
Lorna Simpson, *You're Fine*. 1988,
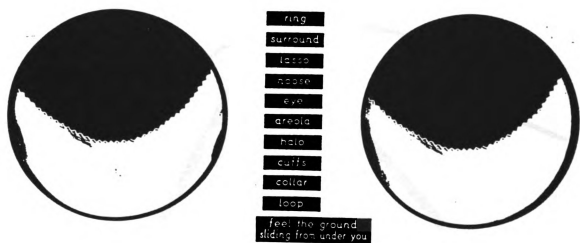Four color Polaroids, 15 engraved plastic plaques, ceramic letters

Figure 2
Lorna Simpson, *Untitled (2 necklines)*, 1989,
Gelatin silver prints, 11 engraved plastic plaques

Figure 3
Jimmie Durham, *Red Turtle*, 1991,
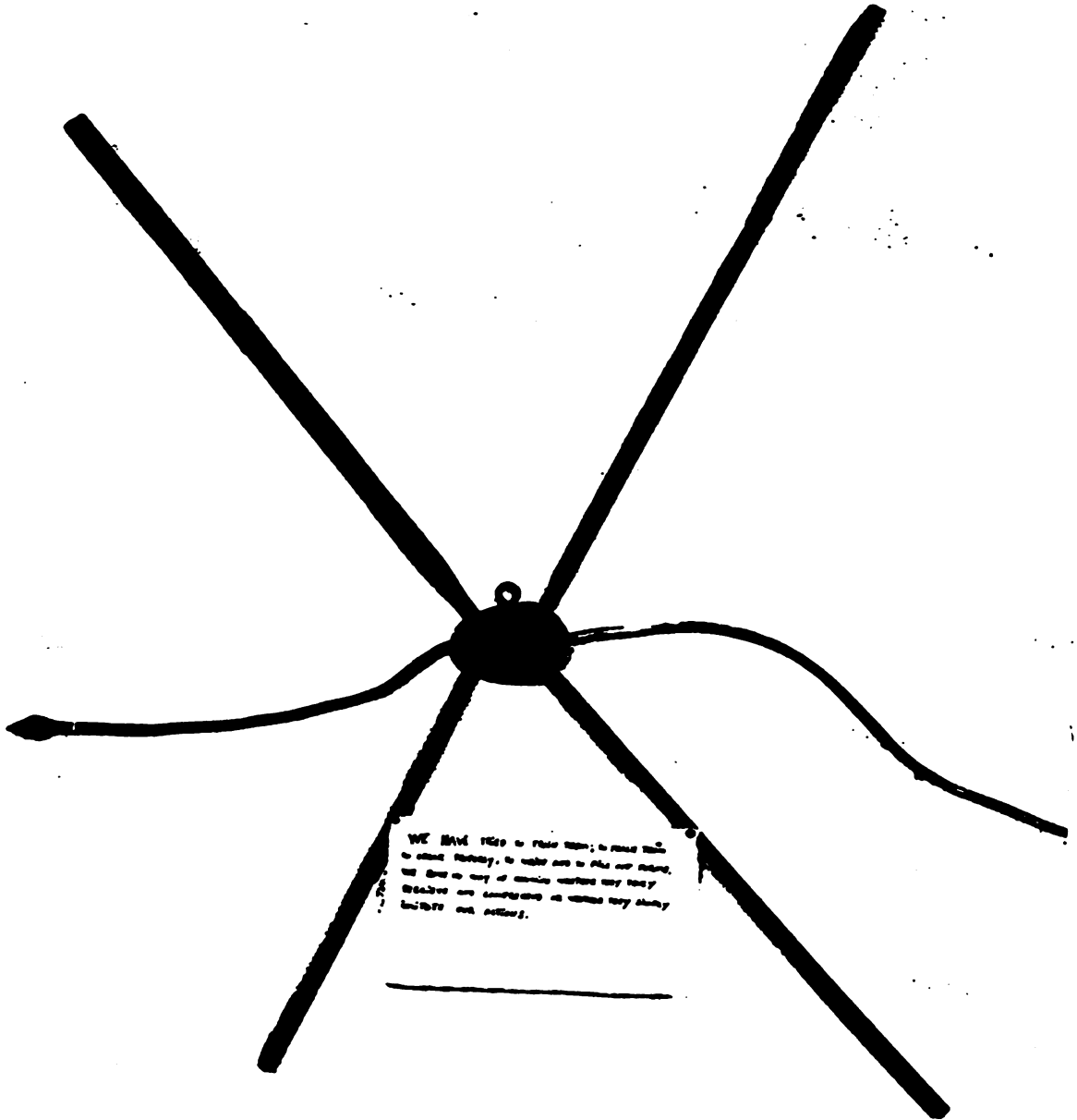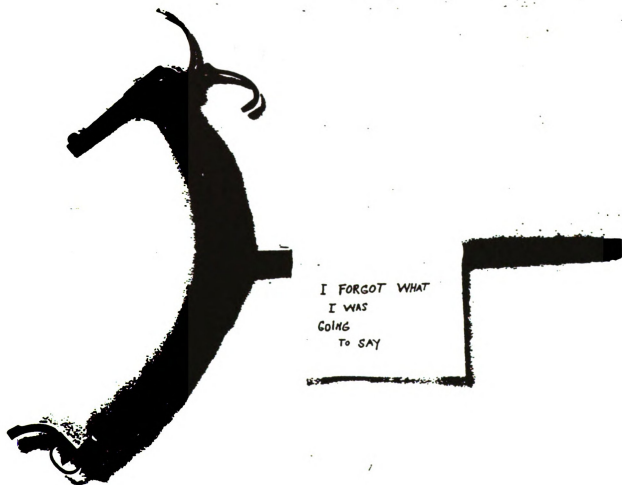Turtle shell, paint, paper, wood

I FORGOT WHAT
I WAS
GOING
TO SAY

Figure 4
Jimmie Durham, *I forgot what I was going to say,* 1992,
Gun. wood, metal screw, canvas

Figure 5
Jimmie Durham. *Untitled*. 1992,
Wood, paint, glass eyes, paper

Figure 6
Xu Bing, *Cultural Animal: A Case Study of Transference*, 1996-1999
Performance installation, video projection

Figure 7
Xu Bing, *New English Calligraphy*, 1999,
Ink, paper, brushes, chairs and tables

Bodies© INCorporated

PLEASE READ THESE TERMS OF USE CAREFULLY BEFORE USING THIS SITE. By using this site, you signify your assent to these **terms of use**. If you do not agree to these terms of use, please do not use the site.

1. RESTRA...
2. TERMS...
3. ...
4. ...

Figure 8
Victoria Vesna, *Bodies INCorporated*, 1996-1999,
Ongoing online art project

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arnason, H. H.. *History of Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Photography*. 3rd. ed. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986.

Ashcroft, Bill and others. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*, New York: Routledge, 1989.

_____. eds. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, New York: Routledge, 1995.

Atkins, Robert. *Art Speak: A Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements, and Buzzwords, 1945 to the Present*, 2nd. ed. New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1997.

Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

Battcock, Gregory *The New Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1973.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.

Baumgaertel, Tilman. "Netzkunst: Philosophische Koerper," *Spiegel On-Line*, Kultur Extra Archiv: Kunst, available from: http://www.spiegel.de/kultarc/kunst/aktuell/vesna.html, Internet; accessed April 9, 1999.

Bearden, Romare and Harry Henderson. *A History of African-American Artists: From 1792 to the Present*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1993.

Bender, Gretchen and Timoth Druckery. *Culture on the Brink: Ideologies of Technology*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1994.

Benjamin, Walter. *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott, New York: Harcourt Brace Javonovich, 1978.

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1994.

"Biography of Victoria Vesna," *Eighth International Symposium on Electronic Art Program Guide, Chicago*, September, 1997.

Bois, Yve-Alain. "The Antidote," *October*, # 39, 1986, 128-144.

Bowman, Russell and Dean Sobel. *Word as Image: American Art 1960-1990,* Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Museum, 1990.

Bruce, Chris. "Navigating the Hall of Mirrors," in *After Art: Rethinking 150 Years of Photography,* Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, 1994.

Burger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* 2nd ed. trans. Micheal Shaw, Mineapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974.

Clark, Toby. *Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: The Political Image in the Age of Mass Culture,* New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997.

Cohen, Ethan. "Xu Bing," *Asian Art Newspaper,* January, 1999, 6-7.

Cromwell, Regina. "Interactive Art and the Videogame: Separating the Siblings," *Camerawork,* Spring, 1993, 10-13.

Danto, Arthur C. "Interview," *The New Art Examiner,* February, 1999, 24-27.

_____. *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History,* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997.

D'Harnoncourt, Anne, and Kynaston McShine. eds. *Marcel Duchamp.* New York: The Museum of Modern Art and The Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973.

Foucault, Michel. *This Is Not a Pipe,* Trans. James Harkness, Berkeley: Universit of California Press, 1983.

Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century,* Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press, 1996.

_____. Ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture,* Seattle: Bay Press, 1983.

_____. "For a Concept of the Political in Art," *Art in America,* Apr. 1984, 17-19.

Goodman, Jonathan. "Bing Xu: 4,000 Characters in Search of Meaning," *Artnews,* September 1994, 99.

Gonzales, Jennifer, "Appended Subjects and Hybrid Incorporations: Bodies INCorporated," available from http://www.ucsc.edu/ accessed 9 April,1999.

Green, Roger. "Exhibit Raises Consciousness," *The Flint Journal,* 5 October 1997, sec. F, 4.

Greenberg, Clement, "Modernist Painting," *Art & Literature,* Paris, No. 4, Spring, 1963, 198-206.

_____. *Art and Culture: Critical Essays,* Boston: Beacon Press, 1961.

Habermas, Jürgen. "Modernity – An Incomplete Project." *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture.* Ed. Hal Foster. Port Townsend, Washington: Ba Press, 1983. 3- 15. Also published as "Modernity versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 8.1, Winter 1981.

Harrison, Charles. *Essays on Art & Language.* Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1991.

Hapkemeyer, Andreas, and Peter Weiermair. *Photo text text photo: The Synthesis of Photography and Text in Contemporary Art,* Museum fur Moderne Kunst, Bozen, Italy and Frankfurter Kunstverein, Germany, 1996.

Harris, Micheal D.. "Toward Object and Verb: History, Dualities, and the African-American Artist," *C Magazine,* Toronto, 1992, 12-22.

hooks, bell. *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics,* New York: The New Press, 1995.

Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984): 53-92.

_____. *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998,* New York: Verso. 1998.

Jana, Reena."David Ross: Director, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art," *Flash Art,* January February 1999, 34-35.

Jones, Kellie. in *Lorna Simpson,* New York: Josh Baer Gallery, Oct. 1989.

Kostelanetz, Richard. *Dictionary of the Avant-Gardes.* Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1993.

Kroker, Arthur and Marilouise Kroker. Eds. *Digital Delirium,* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry,* Trans. E. C. Beasley. London: Longman. 1953. First ed. 1755.

Lippard, Lucy R. . *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism,* New York: Dutton. 1971.

_____. "Jimmie Durham: Postmodernist 'Savage,'" *Art in America,* February 1993, 62-68, 55.

Lovejoy, Margot. *Postmodern Currents: Art and Artists in the Age of Electronic Media*, 2nd ed. New Jersey: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

Lovnik, Geert. "From Speculative Media Theory to Net Criticism," *Mute: Digital Art Critique*, New Contemporaries Insert, 1997.

Mahoney, Robert. "Jimmie Durham: Art World Word Art," *Flash Art*, January, 1993, 84.

McEville , Thomas. "Royal Slumming: Jean-Michel Basquiat Here Below," *Artforum*, Nov. 1992, 95.

_____. "Here Comes Everybody," *Essays, Sunsite Southern Africa*, available from http://sunsite.wits.ac.za/biennale/essays/mceve.htm: Internet; accessed 12 May, 1999.

McKenna, Barbara. *Currents*, Feb. 22, 1999, University of California, Santa Cruz, http://www.ucsc.edu/oncampus/currents/98-99/02-22/chinese.htm

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.

Minor, Vernon Hyde. *Art History's History*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall. 1994.

Mitchell, W.J.T. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994

Mulvey, Laura, Dirk Snawert and Mark Alice Durant. *Jimmie Durham*, New York: Phaidon, 1995.

Murphy, Richard. *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism and the Problem of Postmodernity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Oguibe, Olu. "Digital Other: The Virtual Third World," *Flash Art*, May June 1999, 63.

Popper, Frank. *Art of the Electronic Age*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1993.

Powell, James N. *Postmodernism for Beginners*, New York: Writers and Readers, 1998.

Preziosi, Donald. *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Prinz, Jessica. *Art Discourse/Discourse in Art*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991.

Rapko, John. "The Feminine Masquerade: Works by Lorna Simpson at the Ansel Adams Center," *Artweek*, September 17, 1992, 20-21.

Reisman, David. "Telescreen as Text: Interactive videodisc Now," *Artscribe International*, May, 1988.

Reuter, Laurel. *Into the Dark Sings the Nightingale: The work of Xu Bing*, Grand Forks, North Dakota: North Dakota Museum of Art, 1992.

Ribettes, Jean-Micheal. *Art at the Turn of the Millenium*, eds. Burkhard Riemschneider and Uta Grosenick, Cologne: Taschen, 1999.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

Sandler, Irving. *Art of The Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960's To The Early 1990's*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998.

Schlain, Leonard. *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The Conflict Between Word and Image*, New York: Viking Penguin, 1998.

Shapiro, Meyer. *Words, Script, and Pictures: Semiotics of Visual Language*, New York: George Braziller, 1996.

Simpson, Lorna and Sarah J. Rogers. *Interior/Exterior, Full/Empty*, Columbus, Ohio: Wexner Center for the Arts, 1997.

Taylor, Brandon. *Avant-Garde and After: Rethinking Art Now*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995.

Wege, Astrid. *Art at the Turn of the Millenium*, eds. Burkhard Riemschneider and Uta Grosenick, Colonge: Taschen, 1999.

Weintraub, Linda, Arthur C.Danto and Thomas McEvilley. *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art's Meaning in Contemporary Society 1970's -1990's*, Lichtfield, Conn.: Art Insights, Inc., 1996.

Wright, Beryl J. *Lorna Simpson: For the Sake of the Viewer*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago: 1992.

Wye, Deborah. *Thinking Print: Books to Billboards, 1980-1995*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1996.

Yee, Lydia. review of *Cultural Animal: A Case Study of Transference*, by Xu Bing, accessed March, 29th, 1999, available from http://www.imageseries.com/art-review.htm