



Certain  
signs  
insure  
self-discipline.

# 2

## Resisting the Bunker

While we may never know how it was discovered that cultural workers did not have to create and invent solely for the purpose of maintaining the traditional symbolic order, at least we can be glad that such an idea occurred at all. Since the time of this magical and mythical realization, which occurred approximately two hundred years ago, various interventions from the most minor to the most extreme have been attempted. The most successful, of course, spewed forth from the class that came up with the idea of systematic intervention (revolution) in the first place—the Bourgeoisie. By the turn of the nineteenth century, this band of pistol-packing, sweat-shop building, money-hoarding anti-

feudalists were firmly in control. Once the social order resettled into a configuration that suited this new ruling elite, its members began developing strategies and tactics to ensure that such a large-scale intervention would never happen again. The problem faced by these political upstarts was to make a defense system that would not be perceived as a defense system, or in other words, to decide how capital investment could be fortified without restricting the free flow of production and consumption. Since that time, strategies, tactics, and technologies to achieve this end have been continuously and successfully developed at a pace that has stymied the competition.

Consider the restructuring of Paris under the strategic care of von Haussmann. Here a youthful bourgeois society accomplished its goal, and the demonstration of this accomplishment came with the fall of the Paris Commune. The justification for the Paris face-lift was to create a more appealing city for tourists, and to prevent Paris from being ravaged by industrial growth as London had been. The true meaning of the restructuring became frighteningly apparent, however, when the Communards came to the horrific realization that once the city's outer ramparts were breached, it could not be defended, as their former defense, the barricade, was no match for artillery-supported heavy infantry on broad boulevards. The development of the Parisian fortress was particularly impressive since this was the first application of the idea of opening a space as a means to fortify it.

Times have certainly changed, but the principle of fortification is as deeply engrained in society as ever. In fact, the social landscape itself is little more than a series of bunkers.

The oldest form is the bureaucracy, which in bourgeois society has evolved to its highest form. It is a system of social organization that mainly functions to perpetuate itself. In this capacity, it is designed to resist war, revolution, or natural catastrophe. Within its permanent records is history—the proof of what has happened and what has not. The bureaucracy is a concrete form of uninterrupted, official, and legitimized memory.

Newer forms of the bunker have also appeared. Mass media is certainly the most formidable. The strategies of the open and closed fortress implode in this enveloping bunker. While mass media brings its viewer the world, the world is also held at bay while the viewer commits her gaze to the screen, forever separated from others and from communal space. In this case, the bunker is both material and ideational. On one hand, it serves as a concrete garrison where images (troops) reside. On the other hand, it confirms state-sponsored reality, by forever solidifying the reified notions of class, race, and gender. Bunkers in their totality as spectacle colonize the mind, and construct the micro-bunker of reification, which in turn is the most difficult of all to penetrate and destroy.

Bureaucracies, factories, malls, work stations, media—all are the products of the fortress mentality. The spectacle of these bunkers is designed to give the illusion of sociability, of public interaction, and of free choice, but it actually functions to reinforce the separation already inherent in the division of labor, and to channel the producer/consumer into a cycle of forced labor and consumption.

The bunker is the foundation of homogeneity, and allows only a singular action within a given situation. For example, in a mall one may only consume. The mall is a bunker of perpetual discomfort. There is no place to rest, unless one is consuming (usually in the food court), and in this situation only the most uncomfortable of accommodations are provided so the consumer will hurry, finish, and rejoin the dynamic flow moving from shop to shop. The mall is the mirror image of the assembly line where laborers rotate between specialized actions. Consumption intensification/labor intensification: It is difficult to tell the difference. Labor and consumption are the walls of the bunker that is known as the social world.

While bunker disruption should not be the center of resistant activity, since appearance as a means of domination has been consistently moved to the margins of power, bunkers, particularly of the ideational sort, must be kept under siege. Continual disturbance of these sites is essential in the never-ending battle to maintain a degree of individual autonomy. Disrupting the bunker's symbolic order has long been a standard technique in contestational cultural action, and should still have a place in the future of cultural activism. Over the past century two key models of disturbance have emerged. The first is a sedentary model, which attempts to construct a monumental counterspectacle to compete with (and hopefully overwhelm) the bunker's symbolic order. The second is the nomadic model, which seeks to undermine the symbolic order with more ephemeral, process-oriented methods. At present, the former method seems dominant, at least as far as the *discourse* on cultural resistance is concerned. (In actual practice, it is difficult to say since the latter model does not call attention

to itself. Who knows—there may be an army of culture guerrillas working right now, but there is no way to measure the phenomenon). From CAE's perspective, this is an irritating trend because the sedentary model of cultural resistance seems to maintain bunker consciousness more than it undermines it.

The nomadic model and the sedentary model share similar characteristics beyond their contestational intent. The subtext of all interventionist representation, whether sedentary or nomadic, is pedagogy. The hope is that participants and viewers will engage in a dialogue that will allow them to break through the ideological boundaries of the bunker, and in turn gain a greater measure of autonomy (the affirmation of their *own* desires and control over their surroundings). The truly disturbing (by which CAE does not mean “shocking”) work of cultural representation will help each individual progress toward a more complete subjecthood—s/he will be able to separate him-herself from the objecthood of the machine. Beyond this point, however, agreement between participants in either school becomes less and less common.

Given the points of agreement, which model best accomplishes the desired aim of creating knowing subjects through dialogue and mutual learning? CAE here contends that the nomadic model is far more efficient in achieving this end. While we do not want to disparage the good intentions of those who participate in the sedentary model, we cannot help but believe that such efforts could be put to better use.

Part of the problem with the sedentary model is that its methods and aims are poorly articulated. Many varieties of public, interventionist, and community-based art fall into

this category. Just what, then, is the object of this model? In the best of conditions, CAE takes this category to mean the production of images that are consciously designed to interact with their general physical and ideational surroundings in a manner that moves the image beyond solely aesthetic (spatial) considerations and into dynamic socio-political considerations. (Certainly the old abstract formalist structures [plop art] built with steel girders and iron slabs can be written off as loathsome and unworthy of discussion in the context of resistant images, as can the monuments of the status quo.) Now one must wonder, given this definition, how a critical work located in a museum can be differentiated from one that is located in “public” place, which is generally where most art using the sedentary model with interventionist intent is found. In actuality, there is no difference. Public space does not exist except as a reification. All art, critical or otherwise, once in the social realm, exists only in managed, socially stratified space.

Public art does not exist as there is no public space. The fundamental principle of rational society, as expressed through the fortress mentality, is to manage every piece of territory and to bureaucratize every social action. In such a situation, no one has the right to freely assemble, and no one has the right to install projects, even on what might be called “public property” (a contradiction in terms). Legitimized autonomous zones where one can freely express oneself (politically or otherwise) are long gone, if such spaces ever existed at all. Where could a public work go? In a corn field? That is private property. On the street? That would block the free flow of traffic, thus disrupting the functional intent of the street. In a park? Well yes, if the proper permissions are obtained and all the proper paper-

work is completed and filed. Further, the park is designed for particular forms of structured leisure, and not as a site for autonomous experience; therefore any work placed in the environment must conform to this social structure. The few that can be trusted—that is, those who have been well processed by the bureaucracy (usually through training camps such as art schools), and know how to follow bureaucratic procedure (probably the most important way one is socialized during the education process) can perhaps carry out an impermanent project. A person who has these qualifications, plus public recognition (which is to say a record of bureaucratic acceptance) may be permitted to install a permanent work, but only if the public (i.e., the bureaucracy managing the area) thinks such a project is needed. Consequently, not only is there no public space, but there are very few members of the public qualified to do public work. The problem here is that it is too easy to forget that ownership is not a prerequisite for territorialization. Control of a territory is all that is needed to colonize it. To return to the introductory riddle: When is a fortress not a fortress? One answer is: When it is in the public sphere.

Can the same be said about community-based art? First the word “community” itself is a problem. It has been used broadly, reducing it to the point of absolute meaninglessness. (Most emblematic of this abuse is the oxymoron “the international community.”) In the current rhetoric, “community” seems to mean any aggregate of people who have *one* common characteristic. The connotation of community is one of sympathy if the speaker is someone outside the aggregate, or of identification if the speaker is someone that is a part of the aggregate. Hence terms such as “the gay



community” or “the African American community” have become quite common. Generally, a second connotation seems to follow—that these aggregates are recognized participants in the narrative of victimization (this is partly why there is a connotation of sympathy accompanying this word when it is said by an outsider. Admittedly, it is better than the use of “you people.” Such a connotation also explains why no white male community exists). Finally, community can also mean a people within a given area, usually a neighborhood. The boundaries of such “communities” are often ill-defined, because the ethnographic and geographic characteristics are blended to suit the bureaucratic occasion. These “communities” often are quite large in terms of population, too large for any enveloping personal interaction among the people within them. Further, the institutional affiliations of members residing in a given territory are extremely complex and varied, thus disrupting social solidarity based on race-ethnicity or geography.

Regardless of these definitions, a group that shares a common characteristic and/or a common geography is *not* a community, and never has been one. Community (*Gemeinschaft*) can only exist in a social order with a minimal division of labor. Economic and social specialization under the sign of fetishized hierarchy do not encourage community construction. Communities proper tend toward the sedentary, with the extended family being the general base unit which is in turn extended through the superstructure of friendship. Not only are there enveloping nonrational bonds (kinship or friendship) between members, but there are social norms and values which unify the community members, and which are consensually validated through a spiritual solidarity (often expressed as a

common religion). Every part of social life is shared among community members, rather than one genetic characteristic, one value preference, or a piece of ground. (Please note that CAE is not trying to romanticize this form of social organization by claiming that it is necessarily the most just or desirable, for it certainly has tremendous potential for abuse, and historically, it has fulfilled this potential). While the US may still have some pockets of what could be called community, such a social phenomenon is extremely limited. As with public space, it must be asked: What community!?

In spite of what some artists might say, and in spite of the fact that “community-based art” is becoming a sanctioned bureaucratic category, very little work pertaining to “community” is being done. Most cases are in actuality projects with localized bureaucracies. No artist can just walk into an alien territory and become a part of it. To successfully do such a thing takes years of participatory research. Be that as it may, assuming that an artist has successfully navigated the cultural bureaucracy and acquired money for a community project (for which an artist generally has one year to prove h/erself) just how will s/he insinuate h/erself into a “community?” The easiest way is to have the project mediated by a bureaucracy that claims to represent the community. A school, a community center, a church, a clinic, etc., is then selected, often because it is willing to participate in the project. The bureaucratic experts from the selected institution will represent the community and tailor the project to their specifications in a negotiation that also accounts for the desires of the artist. When the process is over, who has actually spoken? Since the majority of the negotiation over *policy* is not done with individuals

in the territory, but with those who claim to represent it, which is again shaped by the bureaucratic parameters placed on the project by the money donors, how much direct autonomous action is left? How much dialogue has taken place? Not much. What is left is the representation of a representation (the bureaucratic opinion of the artist and h/is mediators).

There are three problems here. One is that the already mentioned rationalization of all territories by institutions geared toward self-perpetuation allows only for the most minimal public dialogue. The second is that monolithic social aggregates do not exist in a hyper-complex division of labor. The left has seen this problem illustrated so many times. For example, feminism does not speak for all women; institutionalized feminism does not speak for all feminists. One bureaucracy cannot speak for a social aggregate, nor for members of a given densely populated territory.

The final problem is the rationalization of collective experience. Efficient large scale social activity has to be bureaucratized. It is the only type of complex social organization known. In order to achieve efficiency, nonrational elements are factored out of the organization process. And yet, it is precisely these elements that can allow for a fulfilling collective experience. For example, in CAE there are power relationships, as is to be expected in any social relationship; however, power in this social constellation does not take the form of domination. One member defers to the expertise of another member whose abilities in h/er area of soft specialization take precedence. Even if one is rationally unsure of the decision the other is making, a nonrational trust has developed over the years that lets

each have faith in the wisdom of the other. The reason that such a social occurrence transcends alienation is only because of nonrational elements of affinity, friendship, faith, and trust. These elements allow the individuals in CAE to work as a unit in our interactions with each other, beyond considerations of exchange or contract economy. This is the type of solidarity and horizontal flow of power that bureaucracy attempts to eliminate; by contrast, the cellular social constellation is among the very few collective experiences where people can actually speak for themselves, in that their individuality is not lost to the mechanics of organization.

Artworks which depend on bureaucracy in order to come to fruition are too well managed to have any contestational power. In the end they are acts of compliance that only reaffirm hierarchy and the rational order. No risk is involved in such work, as it is all done within the confines of the bureaucracy/bunker. How can such work be considered a challenge to the dominant social order? In what manner does it chip away at the bunker? What is most sorrowful is that the minions who carry out these projects are not liberated; rather, they become prisoners of the monuments that their labor produced, as the product of mediation speaks for them.

To be sure, the process that creates public art suffers from overmanagement, but equally unfortunate is that the product suffers from the same fate, for there is no visual object that better represents monologic tyranny than the monument. Monuments have been generously sprinkled throughout "public" property to function as reflective spaces where individuals can commune with the wonder and mystery of the state. In these areas, the contestational voice

is silenced. In these spaces, the whole nation lives as a single community in total agreement, and all social problems dissipate. Only the serene voice of the welfare state (a system concerned only with the benefit of its citizens) gently whispers in the realm of the monument. For example, consider a well-intentioned monument such as Maya Lin's Viet Nam Veterans Memorial. This monument is not as loathsome as most since it is not an outright ideological imperative; that is, it does not make the particular the universal as the monument's realist counterpart does, nor does it participate in the authority of the vertical. However, in spite of the good intentions, this site, which one at the very least would expect to be filled with the anger of howling screams, is silent, punctuated only by quiet sobs. (Granted, the area is so secure that if a howler did begin a counterperformance, s/he would be rapidly escorted away). This memorial is a place for pathological therapy, where the rift between citizen and state is healed in a sick moment of a spectacular reconfiguration of memory.

Can any monument act as a point of contestation? As in the case of Viet Nam Veterans Memorial, contestation around monuments can only happen to a limited degree. Community murals in which all racial-ethnic groups live and work together, thesmog has blown away, and kids play in drug-free parks are to be admired for their utopian intent, and for their affirmation of difference. They can function as a message of hope in areas where there is very little. Much the same can be said of large scale performances in public areas, which are usually designed as reminders of the nature of various social problems. However, such works also seem to have the aura of the "cultural revolution" about them. They are overcoded and predictable, and thereby blend

perfectly with the other public images (billboards that perpetuate the hope of good coffee or clean laundry). The inherent conservatism in monumentality will not allow for any kind of disarming counterspectacle. The result of this medium has always been decided long before the monument is even constructed. Consequently it is purely monologic. No one dialogues with a mural any more than one dialogues with a billboard containing an advertisement. In the end, monuments, even ones created with radical intentions, reinforce the status quo by reinforcing the audiences' predisposition for visual ingestion of rigid codes and stereotypes.

Monuments are closed systems which do not allow for a pedagogy of equality; instead they are a top-down means of delivering information, and the information delivered is generally rather corrupt (i.e., an ideological imperative). In the construction of such public or community work is a class configuration that follows a top-down pedagogy. At the top is the artist-director, since s/he is the one who controls the purse strings. Then come the mediators, and finally come those who are enlisted in the art campaign. As mentioned earlier, the base parameters are set by the upper levels, with the lower levels only having a say in minor contingencies of the plan. While these projects pretend to function in the style of localized co-ops, they work in quite an opposite manner. Grass roots organizations (which should not be confused with a community) work from the bottom up in a situation where like-minded people, out of concern for a specific issue, organize in the spirit of volunteerism. These behaviors are emergent, and consequently no central figure is needed to guide the situation or set policy.

It seems reasonable to conclude that an anti-logos stand as presented in counterspectacle is not the best way to carry on cultural resistance. While such methods are not totally without merit, the categories of production are confused, relying on false territorialization and monologic monumentalism. Overall the experience of the sedentary model of resistant art action is simply too well managed to offer an individual a moment of liberation. What is constructed instead is an alternative or oppositional code which can be just as restrictive as the one which it replaces. But an additional problem exists that is particularly disconcerting to artists: the sign of art seems to get in the way of radical action. The problem is that art is understood in its traditional sense rather than in its newer critical sense. Once an audience outside the specialization of cultural production hears that a given object is art, a set of expectations clicks in that neutralizes resistant meaning: The expectation of an uplifting object that will reveal the wisdom of ages past and the utopian vision of the future, which are in turn associated with the principle of the state. Unfortunately the expectation for art, much like the expectation for electronic media, is one in which the process should be monologic. This should not be construed as a call for anti-art, as art itself is not the problem being discussed; rather, this is a call for artists, once outside the parameters of cultural production for other members of the culture industry, to separate their work from the system of signs which shape the nonspecialist's perception of art. The option of redesigning the popular sign system is certainly there, but that long term process could not be completed in this generation or for many more to come. The only option for immediate practical results is to sidestep the issue altogether by avoiding the designation of resistant cultural

objects as art. Of course should such objects find their way into specialized institutions of culture, such as galleries or museums, the work may be filtered through any sign system. However, in the arena of cultural production for and with nonspecialists, the better a work can blend with the everyday life system (and yet alienate its viewer from the oppressive rote of everyday life), causing them to reflect on their position in it, the more the contestational voice will enter the ideational bunker.

Such a goal is precisely what is accomplished by successful work using the nomadic model. There are two types of nomadic cultural action. The first is process oriented, and is performative. In this case, the nomad selects an action that within a given social situation instigates a dialogue between random co-producers. The second variety is product: An artifact is created, which when deployed in site-specific areas, creates scepticism in the viewer, and in the best case scenarios causes them to question the assumptions about the situation with others. Neither of these tactics is particularly new, having nearly a century of history behind them, but this does not make them any less effective. In fact, in the age of overmanagement, they are the only viable tactics through which any kind of democratic cultural participation can be achieved.

Let us begin with the concept of territory. Unlike monumental conceptions that seek to take and dominate a given area with a single voice that cannot be disputed, the nomadic model rejects the maintenance of a single voice in a given area. The voice of the nomadic cultural worker insinuates itself into a given situation at given moment, only to dissipate in the next. Or a product of similar form



but of oppositional content to other products within a situation is strategically placed where it will likely be consumed by whoever passes through the area. In both cases, the success of the work is dependent upon the relinquishing of control of a given area, as it is only through contrast, difference, and lack of social management on the part of the artist that a disruption and/or dialogue can occur. Once the disruption is spotted by the officials who police the area, one can assume that the area will be reterritorialized immediately. Just the process of seeing this cycle (deterritorialization, disruption, reterritorialization) occur can be extremely enlightening for many, especially when what appears to be the slightest offense provokes the most brutal response from authorities. Use of the nomadic model in this manner requires excellent camouflage in the case of the product, and careful assessment of the time lapse between disruption (for example, people acting autonomously through the exercise of free speech) and the disciplinary response in the case of process. This window will determine the duration of the performance, unless the performer plans to incorporate the police reaction into the script.

An additional aspect of great importance is that this model does not recognize the public/private distinction in regard to territory. This model assumes that the idea of public space is a myth. In rational economy, action is always taken in privatized space, which is to say managed space. The only variable in question is to what degree a site is managed, i.e., how complex bureaucratic restrictions are at a given site, and how powerful is the garrison which patrols the site.

Nomadic action can be understood as unmediated or direct action. The cultural nomad sees all territories as potential

sites of resistance. Once a site has been designated, s/he proceeds to take a place within that territory. No permits are obtained; no permissions are required. No particular social aggregate is designated as audience or participants (although this is not to say that various social characteristics will not be partially determined by territory, as space is most certainly socially stratified); rather participants are viewed as individuals. Each individual in the situation is not guided or directed by the artist, s/he is only encouraged to speak by the artist's process or product. The scripts emerge; they are not written in advance. In this sense, nomadic action is experimental in that the outcome is unknown (which is not to say that parameters are not unknown—police will stop the process or the product will be destroyed). To be sure, a nomadic performance could proceed along a very disappointing ideological trajectory as easily as it could an enlightening one. Such possibilities are quite the opposite of the bureaucratically routinized certainty of monumental culture. Nomadic action occurs in the spatial cracks that separate the forces of micro-management, and in the temporal gaps between autonomous action and punishment, because it is in this liminal location where the possibility for dialogic cultural action is found.

What is more important, however, is that the “public” can participate in generating “public art.” Anyone can participate in the nomadic model to the fullest extent of h/er desire. While nomadic actions can be very elaborate and expensive, they also can be very simple. Nomadic action can cost nothing and still can be incredibly effective—the only requirement is the will to do it. There are no bureaucracies to navigate, you don't have to be a well-schooled or

famous artist, and any site is valid. Hence, no matter what variety of everyday life systems a person participates in, an element of radical practice can always be initiated within it. For those who are not interested in instigating action (for CAE does not want to take the naive view that everyone should be making art if culture is to be democratic), the nomadic work does not determine, silence, or exclude the contributions of anyone who chooses to interact with the process or product.

Through the use of nomadic tactics such as detournment, creative vandalism, plagiarism, invisible theater, or counterfeiting, to name but a few, bunkers can be disturbed. Any work which can create the conditions for people to engage in the transgressive act of rejecting a totalizing and closed rational order, and to open themselves up to social interaction beyond the principles of habituation, of exchange, and of instrumentality within an environment of uncertainty, is one which is truly resistant and truly transgressive, since participants can revel in a moment of autonomy. Only within such situations can dialogue occur, and only through this occurrence can pedagogy have enlightening consequences.

Example of a nomadic work.

### *Are We There Yet?*

Critical Art Ensemble designed this work to be performed at tourist sites and locations of extreme consumption. Note that such locations are heavily garrisoned and fortified, so only the slightest act of deviance is needed to provoke a coercive response.

The performer selected a spot near an entrance/exit area at a public site, taking a position at the side of the entrance way so as to minimize blockage. In place, he began to set up a toy car track and then proceeded to push toy cars around the track. Other cars were displayed for anyone else who wanted to participate. Other collective members insinuated themselves into the crowd that developed, and spoke with the onlookers.

The results: The crowd generally began by speculating on the mental health of the performer. Common themes were that the performer was “loony,” “on drugs,” or a “Viet Nam vet.” Some people would join the performer in pushing cars around the track, sometimes as a taunt, but mostly as gesture of sympathy. Within two to five minutes security guards or police would arrive on the scene. They would approach cautiously, fearing it was a disturbed person who might be prone to violence (the security forces were generally quite public about discussing the situation). The sight of security forces would attract more people to the scene. Security would eventually tell the performer to “move along.” The performer would ignore the command, and act as if he were oblivious to the people around him. Security would then threaten the performer with arrest if he did not move. This is the moment when the most interesting dialogue began, and the greatest understanding of public management emerged. The spectators were suddenly confronted with the reality that a person was about to be arrested simply for playing with toy cars. On most occasions, the majority of people in the crowd would make verbal protests while standing in stunned disbelief, although in every case there were those who thought the police action was for the best, and that the performer really

did need help. On one occasion, violence between the police and the crowd was on the verge of breaking out, and the performance was broken off prematurely. In all other cases, the performance was stopped just prior to arrest.

Notes and figures: Cost of the performance-\$10 for the cars and track; the theater space was appropriated; no performance experience was required.

