

- The economic growth of California and the Southwestern U. S. could never have happened without the labor of undocumented workers.

- Historically, the U.S. government, business and society have been willing to look the other way as long as they are enjoying the profits afforded by undocumented labor.

- Today, in a wrecked economy, the so-called "illegal alien" is once again blamed for the social problems of the region and portrayed as a drain on the economy. In fact, there is no credible statistical evidence that undocumented workers take

more in social services than they give in combined local, state and federal taxes.

- Not only are the crucial economic contributions of the undocumented overlooked or

denied, these workers pay federal income tax, social security, state income tax, DMV fees, sales tax and more.

- Undocumented workers are undocumented taxpayers.

- You pay taxes when you eat a taco at 'berto's, shop for socks at K-Mart, buy toilet paper, hand soap or razor blades at Lucky or fill up your tank at Thrifty Gas.
- Regardless of your immigration status, if you shop you pay taxes. Period.



"Art Rebate" is a project by Elizabeth Sisco, Louis Hock and David Avalos. It is part of the "La Frontera/The Border" exhibition co-sponsored by the Centro Cultural de la Raza and the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, and made possible, in part, through the generous support of the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, The Rockefeller Foundation, the City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture, and the California Arts Council.

Undocumented Workers
Taxpayers

Figure 1. Handbill in English and Spanish (English shown) accompanying the Art Rebate activity, 1993. Courtesy of Liz Sisco, Louis Hock, and David Avalos.

13. Public Art and the Spectacle of Money: An Assisted Commentary on Art Rebate/Arte Reembolso

John C. Welchman

[T]he author [Marcel Mauss] speaks of the thing given or exchanged, which is not inert, but always part of the giver ("to give something to somebody is always equivalent to giving something of one's own person"); he describes the gift as one element in a total system of obligations which are rigorously necessary and may cause war if disregarded, and which also contain a play or "sportive" element; he mentions the "guarantee" or token inherent in the object given, identified with the object itself and such as to constitute obligation "in all possible societies."

—Elvio Fachinelli, "Anal Money-time"

So money acts as a measure which, by making things commensurable, renders it possible to make them equal. Without exchange there could be no association, without equality there could be no exchange, without commensurability there could be no equality.

—Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

If there were once gifts, as Fachinelli remarks in the epigraph, with their threat of war and thread of play, and then there was money, with its posture of Aristotelian equality and guarantee of social exchange, could it be that in the mid-1990s we entered into an era of the *rebate*? Remembering the giving systems of non-Western cultures, it is clear that such a possibility cuts through the foundations of Western liberalism, with its attendant fiscal moralities, and into the domain of postcapitalist circulation, with its spectacular inversions and invisible flows. The theory and performance of the rebate imagines a new nexus of social relations predicated on the negative increments of capitalism's public record. As we follow this passage, the rebate emerges as both a critique and a renegotiation of the social "commensurability" reckoned by Aristotle to arrive with the exchange system of money.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle defines "magnificence in spending" not as some kind of profligacy or inappropriate "liberality," but as the "suitable expenditure of wealth in large amounts." Such expense should be properly relative to the conditions of the spender and the circumstances and objects of the expense, and without "any fixed measure of quantity." When there is propriety in these alignments the magnificent subject becomes, says Aristotle, a "connoisseur" with respect to [his] own social environment. Whether "directed towards the equipping and dispatch of a religious-state embassy, dressing a chorus, fitting out a warship, or furnishing a banquet, the giver will have performed his giving correctly, and at the same time successfully 'reveal[ed] his character,' if [he] spends 'not upon himself but on public objects' so that 'his gifts are a sort of dedication.'"¹

Beginning in July 1993, and continuing intermittently for several weeks thereafter, an untitled group of artists comprising filmmaker Louis Hock, photographer Liz Sisco, and Chicano artist David Avalos² distributed some 450 pencil-signed ten-dollar bills to undocumented immigrant workers in Encinitas and other sites associated with undocumented labor in the vicinity of San Diego, California. The bills were photocopied, and a receipt form was handed out to each recipient, who signed for a serially precise note. The money derived from a five-thousand-dollar commission awarded to the group by the Centro Cultural de la Raza and the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, for the creation of a public art project as part of the exhibition *La Frontera/The Border*. National Endowment for the Arts and Rockefeller Foundation grant monies underwrote part of the project costs.

A press release headed "Tax dollars returned to undocumented taxpayers" claims that the project

operates at the intersection of public space (the streets and the sidewalks), informational space (radio, television and print media) and the civic space between the public and government officials. It activates a discourse that reveals the shape of contemporary social thinking about immigrant labor. Conceptually, this art traces the network describing our economic community as it follows the circulation of the rebated \$10 bills from the hands of the undocumented to the documented. "Arte-Reembolso/Art Rebate" is an art process that envisions public art as an engagement of the social imagination rather than the presentation of monumental objects.

The press release and interviews, editorials, and statements made by the participants in Art Rebate draw on the following claims and assumptions: Working immigrants pay considerably more taxes than they consume in public services and welfare. The fact of their labor poses no or little threat to the job security of other local workers. The immigrants take jobs and accept standards that are below the expectation threshold of citizen-workers. They are unjustly scapegoated for the economic fallibility of the State.

What we encounter in these parameters is an almost perfect negative—or shadow economy—of Aristotle's model of public munificence, which has endured through

the patronage systems of the West with remarkably few logical inflections for well over two millennia (several horizons of technological recalibration notwithstanding). Every term or indicator in the Aristotelian formulation has been inverted in Art Rebate. The project can thus be defined as the (officially) unsuitable redistribution of negative wealth—taken from the state, not bestowed upon it—in small amounts (and multiple instances) according to fixed measures of quantity (the ten-dollar bills). The measure and propriety imagined by Aristotle to extend between the contexts of the spender and the circumstances and objects of the expense is likewise baffled by the groups' pantomime of fiscal recirculation, so that the spending is not on public objects but illegal subjects and results not in a monument or dedication, but rather in an ephemeral fold in an immodestly outsized economic system and a relay of media-driven misinterpretations within whose logical aporias the piece finally dwells.

The scope of these negatives extends even to the sanctioned types of social magnificence itemized by Aristotle. In Art Rebate, then, we witness not the clothing of a theatrical group but the undressing of the choric apparatus of the state-mythology by offstage, extracivic, figures who are vivid only in their everyday appearance. We see not the augmentation of the instruments of seaborne warfare, for example, but rather a gesture that chips a plank—or a splinter—out of taxborne naval spending (in the largest military entrepôt in the world). We find not a sumptuous religious mission, but a tentative token of secular reparation; not a spectacular feast, but a diverted promissory note to assist in basic provisioning.³

It follows that the agents of this inversion cannot be imagined as the magnificent social "connoisseurs" of Aristotle's reckoning, but rather as anti-object-makers who smuggle issues and innuendos into the dark corners of public policy and force them as insinuations through the organs of social commentary. The group played the role of critic-artists, not patron-connoisseurs. Yet their performance is subject to another form of inversion that should introduce a note of caution—or, at least, irregularity—into the symmetrical figures of the quasi-anonymous Art Rebate set against the manifestly honorific Public Gift. Aristotle writes that the act of public giving has a corollary in a revelation of good character that is confirmed by the decision to spend outside, not on, the self. Suggesting a last reversal here might imply that the Art Rebate group acts as surrogate social workers distributing someone else's money in a trade that, while it buys their own celebrity, at the same time renders the subjects of the rebate—the undocumented workers—inert or transparent at the center of a swirl of exchanges, real and virtual.⁴

The Money Sign

With these signs of conventional wisdom in place as social silhouettes, I want to examine one of the key focal lengths of Art Rebate: its rearbitration of the money sign. For in addition to its sudden location in the politics and economics of migrant labor, *Art Rebate* also takes its place within the series of profiles through which twentieth-century

art has loosely engaged with the theory and practice of money and the systemic and social operations of market capitalism. Let me mark some moments in this history.


In *Obligations pour la Roulette de Monte-Carlo* (*Monte Carlo Bond*, 1924), a work that arrives with his relinquishment of "opticality," we find Marcel Duchamp doing steerage on the wheel of fortune. Raising subscription bonds of five hundred francs, Duchamp issued certificates of account featuring a diagram of the roulette board and wheel fringed by twelve interest coupons (*coupons d'intérêt*) printed over a scripted feint background. A Duchamp self-portrait appears in the roulette wheel as a diabolic alter ego, doubled on his already gender-reversed persona, Rrose Sélavy. Written on the back of the bond are four "clauses" "extracted" from the Company Statutes outlining its terms and conditions—including details of annual income payments, property rights, and so on. In a letter to Francis Picabia written from the Café de Paris in Monte Carlo in 1924, Duchamp emphasizes the mechanical, repetitious character of his operation, its "delicious monotony without the least emotion." His effort is a kind of geometric abstraction, worked out between "the red and the black figure," in which, as he so curiously puts it, he is "sketching on chance."⁵

The social and cultural parameters of this piece need to be underlined. Duchamp dresses himself in the haute couture of the financial system, the carnival of excess and consumption represented by the casino at Monte Carlo. He evinces no interest in this wheel of fortune as a social construct, preferring to use the casino as a convenient abstract machine whose flows of capital and margins of profit he wishes to filter and interrupt. But *Monte Carlo Bond* and *Art Rebate* share one key strategy, though each imagines it differently: both take on the economic system through *investment*;⁶ they rely on the supplemental function of the market economy as a machine that makes a return (for profit). Duchamp raises the stakes in the investment process by virtue of his conjugation of stockholding with gaming. But chance, investment, and return are overlaid by *system* in that the predicate of *Monte Carlo Bond* is the triumph of gambling knowledge and technique over normative probability as the house is pitted against the player. The casino plays white in a regulated encounter with modeled similarities to the chess match.

Art Rebate, on the other hand, functions to desupplementize the circulation of money. Like Duchamp, Hock-Sisco-Avalos offer the signature as an inscription of presence. But while Duchamp's self-writing is a paradoxical affirmation of a founding subject who is also split and disguised, *Art Rebate* returns a double signature—the bills themselves are signed, and then the recipients sign *for* the bills. The rebate functions not as an ostensible increment to a rule-bound investment tied in to the vicissitudes of "the table" or "market forces," but rather as a reparation that seeks to acknowledge the unaccounted contribution of an invisible sector of the tax-paying public, who are momentarily sedimented within the ceaseless flow of an abstract system. The piece allegorizes that which is *given back*, but never *accounted for*.

The pseudomoney devil face of Duchamp looks forward, as *Art Rebate* looks back, onto Andy Warhol's irreal, serial re-presentations of dollar bills, gridded and

REEMBOLSO
ART
REBATE



Firma Mariano Rodríguez
Signature

Nombre Mariano Rodríguez Fecha JUL 30 1993
Name Date

Lugar Pacific Beach
Location

A/P 147/4500

Figure 2. Example of a signed receipt for a unit of rebate, with photocopy of the related bill, 1993. Courtesy of Liz Sisco, Louis Hock, and David Avalos.

accumulated like the faces of his American celebrities, which they also contain. Warhol's repetitions are cunningly mimetic. The rows of bills look like an impossible forger's sheet: they take on the appearance of money before circulation. First made in 1962, they began as hand-stenciled images and were among the first works produced in Warhol's silkscreen technique. Accounts of his early career relate the legend according to which Warhol was searching at this time for another "new" subject matter following his appropriation of comic strip imagery in the late 1950s. Coming up with money marked the arrival of a profoundly different horizon for symbolic capital than that imagined, for example, in Mark Rothko's mythopoetic *Search for a Symbol* (1943), a painting that marks the abstract expressionist desire for an art subject fraught with biomorphic suggestion and bursting with metaphoric allusion. Seen in relation to the searches that preceded it, the conjunction of seriality, photography, and banality at this moment is crucial for Warhol, crucial for the art of the 1960s, and represents a key moment in the visual elaboration of the money sign in the twentieth century.

Warhol chose the dollar bill and Campbell's soup cans as the icons of his seriality precisely because they were tokens of commercial iteration and everyday exchange. They were emblems of the new subject matter that stared you in the face. In this sense they participate with the Fluxus conjugations that precede them and the photorealism to come as a central gesture in the U.S. postwar articulation of the *hypergeneric*—the ultimate genre art, the generic raised to a flashpoint. Even a piece as conceptual and documentary as Robert Morris's *Money* (1969), in which fifty thousand dollars put up by a trustee was briefly invested in the stock market, takes its place in the tessellation of trompe l'oeil "realities" that simulate the world as normality, and disdain, borrowing Baudrillard's formulation, the seductions of artifice.⁷

The suggestion that Art Rebate produced aftereffects of postmodern simulation was noted in newspaper reports. Responding to the handouts in the fields of Encinitas, one newspaper critic wrote that "each new \$10 bill [is] as crisp and vivid as a work of hyperrealism." Like Warhol, Art Rebate journeys into the obscene visibility of the money sign. But what Warhol simply appropriates, repeats, and frames, the Art Rebate group fed back into the system that bore it. What is exhibited here is the whole issue of money—its release, holdups, and hidden consequences; the teeming archive of social pressures that move it through our hands and into an infinity of others'. Introduced and accepted some three centuries ago, paper money may be considered a key element of the differential specification of modernity. But it is only since the 1970s that gold convertibility has been abandoned in favor of an international monetary system. This system has progressively rendered visible parts of the money circulation system, such as checking and savings accounts, time deposits, money market funds, and the like, which had previously been unseen (or at least underknown) in a direct conversion economy in many respects still predicated on a literalist scale of weight and equivalence.⁸

If there is now an acknowledgement of postmodern money—which flows along the gradients between presence and absence (calibrated by expectation, probability, a futures market)—the differential functions of immigrant labor should also be recog-

nized. If we can account for the abstractions of the financial machine as they filter through the new accountancy of virtual monies, so the insufficiencies and literalist irrealities of the immigrant labor question stand in need of critical reassessment. In both questions, what is unseen and unaccounted for still has vigorous social and economic effect. The present work attempts to force the sedimentation of an undocumented economy whose hitherto invisible balance sheet images the inverse of the media circus of reflex denigrations.

Of the few art-related projects that intervene in the postmodern reformulation of giving and reparation, Mike Kelley's postappropriational work with craft objects offers one of the fullest explorations of the psychological binds of the gift. His accumulations of stuffed toy animals, dolls, and rugs led to reflection on the enormous investments of time in the production and then use of these profuse and singular objects. The result was *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid* (1987), a cornucopic assemblage of handmade stuffed animals and afghans hashed together furry cheek to stringy jowl in a giddily giant fractal mosaic of gaudy, secondhand fabrics. The piece focuses Kelley's retort to the 1980s debates on commodification and the redemptive value argued for appropriation, which sometimes saw its preliminary "taking" as the mere disguise of a "gift":

This is what initially led to my interest in home-made craft items, these being the objects already existing in popular usage that are constructed solely to be given away. Not to say that I believe that craft gifts themselves harbor utopian sentiments; all things have a price. The hidden burden of the gift is that it calls for pay-back but the price is unspecified, repressed. The uncanny aura of the craft item is linked to time.⁹

Writing specifically of the address in *More Love Hours Than Can Ever be Repaid* to "another form of false innocence . . . the innocence of the gift," Kelley elaborates on its giving routines:

In this piece, which is composed of a large number of handmade stuffed animals and fiberglass items, the toy is seen in the context of a system of exchange. Each gift given to a child carries with it the unspoken expectation of repayment. Nothing material can be given back since nothing is owned by the child. What must be given in repayment is itself "love." Love, however, has no fixed worth so the rate of exchange can never be set. Thus the child is put in the position of being a perpetual indentured servant, forever unable to pay back its debt.¹⁰

In the absence of craft's formal location, stranded outside a "normative" exchange system, Kelley here opens up the signifying terrain of the craft object onto a psychological economy predicated on "mysterious worth," intractable "guilt," and "emotional usury." In a thought that helps us understand his career-long commitment to both intensive and extensive reckoning with agendas that postmodernism often entertained on the surface, or in a political one-dimension, Kelley explores the discrepancy between

emotional and monetary value by separating “junk” art from craft production. The former “could be said to have value IN SPITE of its material; while the craft item could be said, like an icon, to have value BEYOND its material.”¹¹ The values of this beyond were drawn out and recalibrated in other aspects of the three-part Chicago exhibition where *More Love Hours* was shown—notably in *Pay For Your Pleasure*, which evaluated the conjunction of criminality, art-making, and educational knowledge and included a number of collection boxes for donations to victims’ rights organizations. “Since no pleasure is for free—a little ‘guilt money’ is in order,” wrote Kelley. “A small donation to a victims’ rights organization seems a proper penance to pay.”¹² Having pursued the psychology of the gift into the laboriously repressed time of the craft object, Kelley offers it a socially extensive reconfiguration as a reparational payment by the art-going public for its voyeuristic pleasures.

Public Knowledge

Duchamp wrote of “delaying” ideas. Hock-Sisco-Avalos have found a means to funnel the production of their work into a gigantic scene of reception, from which point the “work” takes off as debate. In a sense this is postconceptualism at its most convincing (and least arcane). The group has assisted in the ready-made media convertibility of the project—which appeared on the front pages and in the editorial sections of more leading newspapers than almost any art adventure since the launching of futurism in *Le Figaro* in 1909, or the orchestrated height of the Life and Death of Pollock and Warhol. Yet, they have done so while remaining almost anonymous, thus engendering a wholly opposite mode of media infiltration to the ghoulish cults of personality variously brokered from Marinetti to pop.

Reading through the extraordinary growth of media prostheses that supply the afterlife of the piece, it is striking that the Art Rebate group, their critical and write-in supporters, and the fiercest of their art world and media antagonists share one notable convergence: all claim that the project has had the effect of turning things upside down. This attitude is surely one of the many satellites fixed by the gravity of the avant-garde. Yet no longer are we confronted here by the kind of territorial expansionism according to which the artist or movement takes its gesture of practice *a little further into the unknown*. Instead, as we saw in the logical relation between Aristotelian liberalism and the defaults of the rebate, inversion is the order of the day: the other is the subject; the recto is glimpsed when looking at the verso.

In a railing conjugation of war, domestic economics, and art that denounces Art Rebate as “the artists’ version of the Pentagon’s \$600 toilet seat and the \$7,000 coffeepot,” an editorial in the *San Diego Union-Tribune* predicates its antipathy on a reversal of (newspaper) values, on what its writer(s) designates as the palpable absurdity that the action should be “front-page instead of art-page.”¹³ Seldom does the print media produce such a volumetric metacritique of its own spatial proprieties. But here an editorial from the sanctioned place of opinion in the middle of the

paper takes on the task of controlling its precincts, adjudicating first between "news" and "art," front and back, top and bottom, and then between the relative value of "real" and "surplus" news.

This reversal, acknowledged by the institutional organ of the press that actually resisted it, is one among many. As the group put it in the *Los Angeles Times*, "the politicians are acting like performance artists and we're trying to be political." "The art," they continue, "will ride these \$10 bills through the circuits of a failed economy, entering a space where politics is fiction and conceptual art is attacked for being politically real."¹⁴ The chain of these inversions is both crucial to the intervention in public art represented by Art Rebate and somewhat particular to the function of money. Michel Foucault noted that one of the founding reversals of modernity was a migration in understanding from the notion that "the sign coins bore—the *valor impositus*—was merely the exact and transparent mark of the measure they constituted" to the idea that "money (and the metal of which it is made) receives its value from its pure function as sign."¹⁵

Art Rebate bears this system of reversals into our postmodernity. For the shape of such tropes of camera obscura reversal evinces a postconceptual, postpolitical world turned upside down. For Marx, we recall, it was the fabrication of ideology by the status quo that caused the unfolding of "normative" events and relations to be understood as grounded, when they might, in fact, have been overturned, or up in the air. But while abstraction, inversion, and ideology are central problematics in Art Rebate, what turns things upside down here is not so much the making-seeming-being of the early capitalist state, but rather the entrapment of that inversion in the media machine of the 1990s, the informational hall of mirrors that simultaneously duplicates, corrugates, and blinds. While the new inversion may be stroboscopically fixed and virtually perceived, its unknowable auratic efficacy is symptomatic of what Anthony Giddens terms a culture of the "management of risk."¹⁶ Its mesmeric opportunism measures the distance from the camera to the hologram.

These provisions oblige us to rethink the relation of Art Rebate to the filament of public visual culture that reaches from traditional memorial statuary through the outdoor sculptural monumentalism of the mid-twentieth century, from the radical and populist public art projects of the 1960s and 1970s and the "site-specific" work of the 1970s and 1980s, to what has recently been termed "New Genre Public Art." If Art Rebate's relation to the Aristotelian tradition and its vapor trail of classicist affirmations can be defined as logically antithetical, its position at the end of this genealogy is likewise locked in a fundamental dispute with the historical constitution of both "the public" and "art". To assess Art Rebate's management of this dispute, we can turn to two discussions of public art, organized around the seemingly antagonistic principles of the "local" and the collaborative, on the one hand, and endemic "violence," on the other. Lucy Lippard has gathered projects from the more recent side of the tradition of public art under nine headings. These include

3. site-specific outdoor artworks . . .
5. performances or rituals outside of traditional art spaces that call attention to places and their histories and problems, or to a larger community of identity and experience.
6. art that functions for environmental awareness . . .
7. direct, didactic political art that comments publicly on local or national issues, especially in the form of signage on transportation, in parks, on buildings, or by the road, which marks sites, events, and invisible histories.
8. portable public-access radio, television, or print media . . .
9. actions and chain actions that travel, permeate whole towns or appear all over the country simultaneously to highlight or link current issues.¹⁷

Art Rebate is not the only recent project achieved in public space that seems to cut across all or most of these definitional brackets. But its multiple locations are more indecisive than usual (Lippard lists earlier work by the group under heading number 7), enabling the rebate to enter into a form of what I will argue is constructive contradiction with the dominant rhetoric of activist art. Many critics share Lippard's commitment to the insinuation of public art with a "resonant" notion of "place" and to radicalized, but more or less traditional, forms of image production (and circulation). Jeff Kelley, for example, argues that the collaborative "common work" of public art should be based on "a rejection of abstraction and an embrace of the particular. . . . Modernist utopianism dissolves into a landscape of what might be called a postmodern social realism. Abstract space becomes particular place."¹⁸

But Art Rebate is not predicated on the production of images, whether pictorial, photographic, or for alternative TV. Instead it is brought into being by the mainstream media's construction, reception, and misidentification of them. It is not fitted out with redemptive empathy for the loss of place. Instead it diverts flower and fruit workers from their counter-Edenic labor, literally buying moments of their time by asking them to sign a pact with the devilish dollar. Art Rebate is less a ritualized performance than an inverted business transaction, ordered by a desk, a chair, a pencil, and a signature. It deliberately collides and overlays the abstraction of Western systems of finance, "documentation," and media flow with conceptual minimization of form and the gray "indexical present" of the rebate scene.¹⁹ Above all, the "political" in Art Rebate is not "direct" or "didactic." Its "commentary" is not shouted out from public signage, but fetched from the retaliatory clamor of real and art-world reaction. This move to force the surrogate completion of the work in an alien, even hostile, environment—here the mainstream media—is rare in contemporary art. However, writing of the strategies of abjection taken on in the 1990s, Hal Foster suggests that "just as the old transgressive Surrealist once called out for the priestly police, so an abject artist (like Andrés Serrano) may call out for an evangelical senator (like Jesse Helms), who then completes the work, as it were, negatively."²⁰ While the two projects

share a similar diagram of reversal effects, among many conditions that separate it from Serrano's cultivation of scandal, Art Rebate sets out an intervention in the territory of giving, repairing, and refunding that furnishes grounds for the work's extension in debate. With Art Rebate, the predicate of donation is borne into the media outcome, and effect becomes cause.

It follows, then, that while sharing a superficially similar connection to "sources," the giving of the rebate is different in kind from the "generosity" invoked by Lippard. "Art is or should be generous," she writes, "but artists can only give what they receive from their sources. Believing as I do that connection to place is a necessary component of feeling close to people, to the earth, I wonder what will make it possible for artists to 'give' places back to people who can no longer see them."²¹ The locative commitment reaches a (utopian) crescendo in this formulation. Places themselves, Lippard suggests, should be the objects of giving in gestures symbolic of the ultimate reparation of humankind and the earth.

The conception of Art Rebate, the "events" that constituted its "action," and its complex afterlife in the media are ranged squarely against the idea that "of all forms of art, public art is the most static, stable, and fixed in space." It is countermonumental according to the same understanding, which suggests that "the monument is a fixed, generally rigid object, designed to remain on its site for all time."²² And it intervenes differently within—in fact it insists upon a rearticulation of—the relation of artwork to Habermas's notion of "an ideal, utopian public sphere" somehow conceived against "the real world of commerce and publicity."²³

One outcome of these differences may be found in the representation of violence, considered by W. J. T. Mitchell to be "repress[ed]" by public art, which "veil[s] it with the stasis of monumentalized and pacified spaces." Restricting his comments to the production of "images," Mitchell identifies three ways in which "violence may be in some sense 'encoded' in the concept and practice of public art":

- (1) the image as an *act* or *object* of violence, itself doing violence to beholders, or "suffering" violence as the target of vandalism, disfigurement, or demolition; (2) the image as a *weapon* of violence, a device for attack, coercion, incitement, or more subtle "dislocations" of public spaces; (3) the image as a *representation* of violence, whether a realistic imitation of a violent act, or a monument, trophy, memorial, or other trace of past violence.²⁴

Imagined and performed outside the tradition of image or object production, Art Rebate recasts Mitchell's categories of corporal violence perpetrated on physical bodies by precipitating new figures in the passive, ever-present violence of everyday discrimination. Far from glorifying the militaristic values of the state or perpetuating the abstract violence of "radical autonomy,"²⁵ Art Rebate turns these values back against the power structures that bore them, replacing the signs of violence with the tokens of a relational reparation.

It is around the question of violence and its disapprobation that we can identify

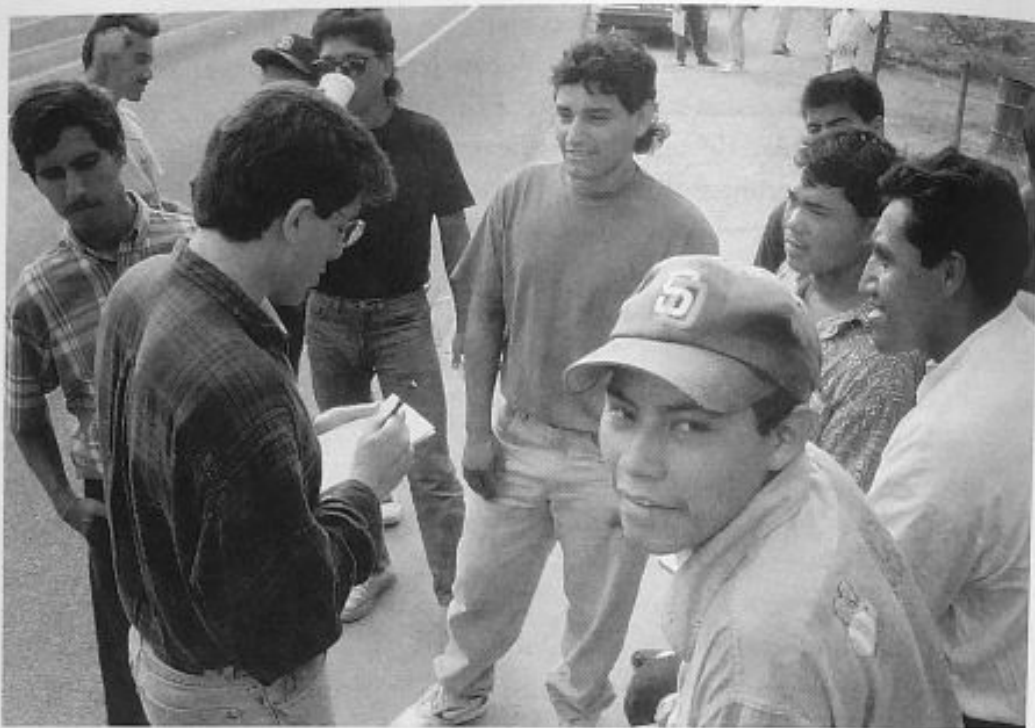


Figure 3. Sebastian Rotella of the *Los Angeles Times* interviews recipients of Art Rebate in Carlsbad, San Diego County, August 4, 1993. Courtesy of Liz Sisco, Louis Hock, and David Avalos.

one of the more significant destinies of the critical conjunction set in motion by Art Rebate between media commentary, mainstream and corporate culture, and local guerrilla activism. By late 1998, half a decade after the rebate of dollar bills in North County, the domain within which conceptual art could be identified with aspects of public culture had expanded to such an extent that the equation appears almost commonplace. Now, partly because conceptualism has a more settled and generalized location in recent visual history and partly because the conditions of radical intervention have clearly shifted, "conceptual art" is readily identified with the opposite of direct or violent action, becoming the metaphoric code name for a virtual politics of on-line disruption, blockage, shutdown, infiltration, and counter-slogonization. Writing of the new "hacktivism" in the *New York Times*, Amy Harmon, a "software engineer who designed the FloodNet program," anxiously distinguishes her commitment to "denial of service attacks" from the real-world violence of terrorism on precisely these grounds. "This isn't cyberterrorism," she observes. "It's more like conceptual art."²⁶

In another register, Art Rebate also flirts with absurdity and reduction, teetering on the brink of its own dissolution. While its futuristic abstraction threatens the social reality it seeks to underline, this risk is reasoned. For you can't speak "information" back to the new inversion, using the language of "facts." You can't paint social oppression any more. You can't even photograph it. To film it or document it is to surrender to the facility of the newly invisible. To hook a point in the hyperspace of public opinion you have to go fly-fishing with social abandon. Here is an art of camouflage where nothing is covered up; a fickle portrayal of the nonrepresented. It is not a hymn to the

abandoned. Its sentimentality is actual, but accidental. It had to frighten the Left as well as appall the Right. It had to be a fake before it was born. It was destined to use the media as a hallucinogen. It had to refuse both means and ends.

What's most surprising, perhaps, is that in this Northwest Passage through the labyrinth of media complicity, Art Rebate also flirted with the fixed-rate interest of visual modernism: in one sense the project is as minimal and self-reflexive as the paintings of Morris Louis. It had to go out into the info-world as magically as Louis went into the canvas. They share a common staining. Both were born into their unknowable reach by the chatter of critics and commentators. Both are immaculate finalities, and impossible fictions. Both leverage the artist-critic relationship into the necessities of connoisseurship.

Look at it another way and you see the double funnel of the perspective diagram, reaching between the inner eye and the outer object. An instrumental cultural politics is not rejected here. It is assumed. This is an art action as social intervention: risking atrophy and courting dissolution, knowingly simulating the aura of avant-gardism, flaunting surface gesture in the face of historical depth, the pitch of the piece still comes through. Even as it problematizes the social clarities of what it seeks to challenge, Art Rebate helps us reimagine the parameters of a cultural politics for the nineties (without—like Duchamp and his progeny—being poker-faced).

The regime of avant-garde appropriation and its 1970s denouement have been stretched like a hologram, from all sides. Art-world funding, public art, critical opinion, newspaper commentary, real and virtual money—and money as a visual sign—have all been appropriated. But the project does not consist in the representation or relocation of any of these borrowed parts. It declares itself, instead, in the sum of their subtractions, as what is left over when they have all been taken away. Forcing us to witness the whirlwind of conflicting strategies that make up the social correlative of appropriation itself, Art Rebate came as close as anything I can imagine to a gesture of postappropriation—a subterfuge of taking where everything appropriated is inseparable from that which is given back. Remembering Bataille's distinction between excretory heterogeneity and appropriational incorporation, it is clear that Art Rebate's "heedless expenditure" is one of the "certain fanciful uses of money"²⁷ that expose the violence inflicted on the underside of the social body.

Notes

1. *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. and trans. J. A. K. Thomson (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1953), book 4, chap. 2, 99–102.
2. For a useful account of previous public art collaborations by this group and a number of other San Diego artists, see Robert L. Pincus, "The Invisible Town Square: Artists' Collaborations and Media Dramas in America's Biggest Border Town," in *But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, ed. Nina Felshin (Seattle, Wash.: Bay Press, 1995), 31–49.
3. Critics—hostile and supportive—noted the immediate use value of the rebated bills. Disparaging what he terms the "arts-babble" of the project description, George Will, for example,

writes: "It was also lunch, as some recipients rushed to a food truck to buy tacos with their wind-falls." George F. Will, "The Interaction of Space and Tacos," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, Sunday, August 22, 1993, editorial page, G-2, from the Washington Post Writers Group.

4. Several critics underline the perceived neglect by the Art Rebate group of the kind of community preparation, involvement, and follow-up that would have allowed the project to function as something more than a momentary interlude of surprise—or shock—and minor good fortune for the undocumented workers themselves. Michael Kimmelman finds in this lack the grounds for a sweeping dismissal: "By all accounts, that publicity stunt had nothing to do with serious collaboration between the artists and the workers; both as social service and as a mediation on the problems at the Mexican-American border it was laughably meager. Its real audience was the art world and its critics, among whom the gesture of giving away public money for the arts had precisely the intended incendiary effect. Had it not provoked a response from that group, the whole gesture would have been, on the face of it, empty." "Of Candy Bars, Parades, and Public Art," *New York Times*, September 26, 1993, section H.

5. *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 187.

6. Duchamp was not the only artist to investigate the art of investment. Robert Morris's *Money* (1969) was one of a number of conceptual projects from the late 1960s and 1970s that foregrounded the operations of market capital. Among younger artists, Linda Pollack's *The Art of Investment*, performed at the Dutch Art Fair (KunstRAI) in 1994, used an art subsidy granted by the Dutch government as capital to be invested on the basis of advice solicited from seven Dutch financial experts in public interviews conducted during the course of the fair.

7. The work, consisting of correspondence and the stock certificate, was made for the *Anti-Illusion* exhibition at the Whitney Museum in New York, and was cited in various debates on the status of the art "object" in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

8. See Michel Foucault, "Exchanging," chap. 6 in *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1970).

9. Mike Kelley, "In The Image of Man," statement for *The Carnegie International 1991*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pa.; cited from artist's MS, p. 1.

10. Mike Kelley, "Three Projects by Mike Kelley at the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago: *Half a Man; From My Institution to Yours; Pay for Your Pleasure*," *Whitewalls* (a magazine of writings by artists), no. 20 (fall 1988): 9–10. In "Mike Kelley's Line," Howard Singerman underlines the emotional bind of the home-crafted gift: "What is asked for in exchange for this excessive value is appreciation, devotion, love" in *Mike Kelley, Three Projects: Half a Man; From My Institution to Yours; Pay for Your Pleasure*, exhibition catalog (Chicago: The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1988), 10.

11. Kelley, "In the Image of Man," 1.

12. Kelley, "Three Projects," 12.

13. *San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 5, 1993.

14. *Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 1993. The same point is made by David Avalos in Robert L. Pincus, "'Rebate' Gives Good Return for a Minor Investment," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 22, 1993, E1, E8. In a different context, Guillermo Gómez-Peña suggests a similar exchange: "Joseph Beuys prophesied it in the seventies: art will become politics and politics will become art. And so it happened in the second half of the eighties. Amid abrupt changes in the political cartography, a mysterious convergence of performance art and politics began to occur. Politicians and activists borrowed performance techniques, while performance artists began to mix experimental art with direct political action." Introduction to "Track IV: Performance Politics or Political Performance Art" of "From Art-Mageddon to Gringostroka: A Manifesto against Censorship," in *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, ed. Suzanne Lacy (Seattle,

Wash.: Bay Press, 1995), 99. For further examples of this reversal from street protests in Eastern Europe, see John C. Welchman, "APROPOS: Tune In, Take Off," *Art/Text*, no. 57 (May-July 1997): 29-31.

15. Foucault, *Order of Things*, 176.

16. Anthony Giddens, lecture at the University of California, San Diego, February, 1993.

17. Lucy R. Lippard, "Looking Around: Where We Are, Where We Could Be," in *Mapping the Terrain*, ed. Lacy, 122-23.

18. Jeff Kelley, "Common Work," in *Mapping the Terrain*, ed. Lacy, 147-48.

19. Adrian Piper laments the relative ineffectualness of "global political art," which, "however forceful, original or eloquent it may be . . . is often too removed from the indexical present to situate the viewer, him or herself, in the causal network of political responsibility." Adrian Piper, "Xenophobia and the Indexical Present," in *Reimagining America: The Arts of Social Change*, ed. Mark O'Brian and Craig Little (Philadelphia, Pa.: New Society, 1990), 285; cited by Arlene Raven in "Word of Honor," in *Mapping the Terrain*, ed. Lacy, 167.

20. Hal Foster, "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic," *October*, no. 78 (fall 1996): 116.

21. Lippard, "Looking Around," 129.

22. W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Violence of Public Art: *Do the Right Thing*," in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 183.

23. Ibid. Introducing a discussion of the relation between public art and commercial film, Mitchell is here characterizing—though not necessarily "accept[ing]"—Habermas's distinction between a "culture-debating" public (associated with the former) and a "culture-consuming" public (associated with the latter).

24. Ibid., 381.

25. This term is used by Suzi Gablik in "Connective Aesthetics: Art after Individualism," in *Mapping the Terrain*, ed. Lacy. See, e.g., p. 79: "What the *Tilted Arc* controversy forces us to consider is whether art that is centered on notions of pure freedom and radical autonomy, and subsequently inserted into the public sphere without regard for the relationship it has to other people, to the community, or any consideration except the pursuit of art, can contribute to the common good."

26. Amy Harman, "'Hacktivists' of All Persuasions Take Their Struggle to the Web," *New York Times*, October 31, 1998, A6.

27. Georges Bataille, "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl, trans. Stoekl, with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 94.