

# LIMITED IMMUNITY

Despite rumors of takeover schemes and buy-outs, it is definitely not true that art has exchanged the logic of transcendence for the logic of the commodity. They are still negotiating. Artists can be assured that as long as negotiations continue, a zone of autonomy will continue to exist. This autonomy is attractive and compelling for artists. It promises independence and insulation from demands that art serve specific purposes or have a means-end relationship to practical life. This zone, this privileged space with its freedom to speculate, is theoretically amoral and without responsibility to the society in which it exists. But its very presence—a social phenomena itself—constitutes a relationship to society

which is neither neutral nor natural. That artists and art are influenced by the social formation is a given, since they are products of it. An artist can take refuge in this autonomous space in order to make art, but the privilege of this refuge does not extend to the work of art itself. Making the work of art is a private choice, but a public act.

The desire to make art is a desire to have a relationship to the world. The acknowledgment of this social intention exists in the work of art itself. To be understood as a work of art by anyone other than the artist, the work must be experienced as art. This experience occurs outside the boundaries of autonomy. It exists in the public sphere.

In the past, the zone of autonomy was extended from the artist to the art. When it came to the work of art, however, this autonomy was compromised by a dependence on limited methodologies of interpretation and a corresponding reception by an ideal but imaginary public. The paradox is that the autonomous sphere while now more limited than ever has never been more truly self-governing, more free, more alive with possibility. Art, after decades of complaints, has been cut loose from a narrow and codified interpretation. There no longer exists a unified set of assumptions about art, either in its making or in its interpretation, just as, in the world itself, the grand narratives have given way to frag-

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ile local fictions. The avant-garde aesthetic devices of defamiliarization, transgression, and displacement are the familiar, dependable, and inescapable elements of our daily environment. This new freedom means that the artist is no longer bound to a set of interpretive conventions. The artist is not bound to them because they no longer exist. They are no longer there to be modified, shared, used as guideposts, or even thrown overboard.

Abstraction, in particular, became historically identified with goals of transcendence. This transcendence relied on a closed system of interpretation to guide the initiated viewer to the "correct" perception of an art object. To do this re-

quired a denial of the complexity of the world. A world that operated on unified philosophical and economic principles was a world that could be transcended by equally limited means.

The artists' complicity in this was in translating the primarily literary methodology of their interpreters into their own goals for making art. Experience and consciousness are already at work in art. To limit art is to deny its potential; it is to cripple the creative process itself. Art has the rare ability to bypass logic and conventions of thought, and by doing so, to both interpret and transform them.

If thought is determined by language, and the making of art is determined by thought, then art exists in relationship to

language. Language is simultaneously our most private, our most autonomous sphere, and also our most public. Once art, like language, enters this public sphere its meaning is at constant risk, its effect determined by the changing cultural context in which it functions. To make an art which merely proclaims the autonomy of the artist, and the inviolability of creativity is as hard to imagine as an orbiting satellite that announces it has no origin and no destination.

*Valerie Jaudon is represented by the Sidney Janis Gallery. Her public project for the Police Plaza behind the Metropolitan Court House was recently cited in TK and is presently under construction.*