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"For an Autonomy with a General, Socialized Horizon" —An Art Theory of Reform

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Abstract: Drawing on important incursions of Marxist feminism into art history and theory, this article proposes a more capacious idea of reform as an extension of the historical sites and potential critical ramifications of social reproduction as an art theoretical framework. Social reproduction theory has altered the accepted bifurcation of autonomy and social engagement as two poles of Marxist aesthetics. I offer both a methodological addendum to existing employment of a social reproduction analytic for art, especially as this literature has mainly focused on post-medium practices after the late 1960s. Moreover, I ask what a dialectical concept of reform—as revolutionary and counterrevolutionary simultaneously—does to existing ideations of artistic criticality predicated on autonomy. I endeavor to theorize reform to explain the art of the painter and organizer Betty Blayton in the late 1960s. That Blayton's art takes the form of color field painting—the idiom of reactionary conservatism in the immediate postwar decades—is unimaginable within most treatments of critical art practice after conceptual art, indeed it is usually the constitutive exclusion. Working through the pertinent literature on social reproduction and artistic autonomy, as well as revisiting canonical texts, I argue that an art theory of reform introduces a distinct form of artistic subjectivity that simultaneously undertakes and references the labor which undergirds art and is its condition of appearance. This artistic labor is distinct from performance or social practice art in its maintenance of the constitutive separation between art and devalorized reform (as reproductive) work. By extension, this split artist subject exceeds—encompasses, if not sidesteps—critique defined by negation. In accepting a relative invisibility stemming from its incomplete negation, such practices risk the slander "reform or reformist."

Keywords: *Social Reproduction Theory; Marxist Feminism; Artistic Autonomy; Modernism*

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E.C. Feiss

Over the last decade, considerable attention has been paid to art concerned with "social reproduction" and, in tandem, to the attunement of social reproduction theory as a framework in art history and theory.[1] Such scholarship historicizes certain, particularly avowedly feminist, practices in terms of their engagement of relevant themes (such as domestic work) and the artists' historical cognizance of reproduction as a reality and analytic.[2] Other texts position particular art objects alongside the activist genesis of social reproduction theory in the 1970s, such as the Wages for Housework movement in Italy.[3] Some have analyzed specific media, like textiles, as bridging art and domestic work. In this paper, I build on the momentum of this literature by questioning the assumed objects and historical scene required for an analysis informed by social reproduction theory and ask what Marxist feminism can do for existing models of political aesthetics or the critical potential of art. Revolution and revolutionary actions are frequently opposed to an idea of reform as a capitulatory program. Yet reform operations frequently intersect with reproductive work, such as community organizing and social work.

How does Marxist feminism—understood as an explanation for how value is produced at scale—enable a political aesthetics distinct from existing models based in rupture, intervention, and a discernible idea of "transformation?"[4] When positing the historical terrain of advanced art's potential landscape of action, I am interested in complicating total concepts of "actual revolution or state-political crisis," as if crisis takes hold for all people uniformly, and as if it is not mitigated, in the long aftermath that follows, by the more inconspicuous efforts of those in its wake.[5] "Reform" as a shorthand frequently plays the strawman to the properly "prefigurative," supposedly carrying no aesthetic capacity of its own. I am not undermining a historically Left definition of revolution, as is done in some accounts of contemporary art practice; its definition remains that of the abolition of capitalism.[6] Instead, what some critics

1. Betty Blayton, *Reaching for Center*, 1970. Acrylic, oil pastel, and paper collage on canvas, 58.5 tondo. Courtesy of the estate of Betty Blayton and the Betty Blayton Taylor Trust, photograph by Timothy Doyon for the Mnuchin Gallery.

of contemporary art may be referring to as "revolutionary" are perhaps better thought of as well-founded reforms. As Rosa Luxemburg put it, the question of reform and revolution is one of means and ends, their partnership "an indissoluble tie."[7] Reform's counterrevolutionary potential is its capacity to produce an "inverted image," a misguided ideation or proposal.[8] The example she gives is trade union control. For Luxemburg, the struggle between reform and revolution is for the "petty-bourgeois or proletarian character of the labour movement."[9] The central concern here is the character undergirding the orientation of a political program, the set of values or personality—an essence we might classify as aesthetic—determining that program's political limits. Relatedly, Saidiya Hartman has recently parodied the petty bourgeois voice of racial liberalism in the figure of "Crow Jane," isolating the efficiency of contemporary claims for reform to the extension of anti-Black social order.[10]

At the same time, Marxist and related feminisms have articulated practices which enable people to persist under as yet unchanged conditions. For Silvia Federici, such work garners the seizure of autonomy within existing social relations.[11] Ruth Wilson Gilmore has discussed social change as both "short of and longer than a single cataclysmic event," one wrought of "persistent small changes" and "unexpected consolidations." These thinkers distinguish a myriad of activity from hegemonic reform. One of Gilmore's central examples is Mothers Reclaiming Our Children, or Mothers ROC, a grassroots prison abolition organization based in Los Angeles whose work spurred the formation of many organizations beyond their own. The group drew on the "ideology of motherhood" to effect change, and Gilmore notes how the group worked through paradox and compromise to effect "non-reformist reforms."[12] These endeavors contain strains of "autonomizing" practice (i.e., the enablement of self-legislating life practice), while they accommodate or fuse with structures that propagate or excuse the given social order.

In this paper, I understand reform work as one outward shape of reproductive labor, one of its many waged types. To move beyond the easy dismissal of "reform" in shorthand, it is necessary to understand the term's relationship(s) to reproductive labor: as a strain of reproductive activity itself and as an administrative variant, as a term which indicates the management of population. To this end, I introduce the work of the painter Betty Blayton (1937–2016), whose practice I work through the idea of reform to account for.

Blayton was a color field painter who also worked as a community organizer and an anti-poverty administrator (essentially a welfare employee), a position often dismissed by her nationalist peers in the Black Arts Movement as dangerously reformist, or as carrying out the federal mandate to contain Black urban populations during the 1960s uprisings. Her work spanned the spectrum of

reform, from creating spaces of autonomy as an organizer to compromise with the federal stake in social control as an anti-poverty employee. Alongside this activity she made paintings, and the two together—reform and art production—amounted to her life work. This painting indexed her total activity, providing abstract compositions for unrepresentable labor.

Reading social and artistic practice as related isn't new in Marxist art history or theory, but Blayton's activity (from welfare to policy) wouldn't be recognized within canonical definitions of politics. In what follows I describe an interplay between her state and art work which chimes with classical Marxist art historical approaches, yet Blayton's work introduces a distinct form of artistic subjectivity which simultaneously undertakes and references the labor which undergirds art and is its condition of appearance. By extension, this split artist subject exceeds—encompasses, if not sidesteps—critique defined by negation. An art theory of reform extends the historical sites and possible configurations of social reproduction's relationship to art. In this sense, this essay offers a methodological addendum to existing feminist art historical employment of social reproduction, especially as this literature has mostly focused on post-medium practices after the late 1960s. As a theory, it further asks what a more fully realized concept of reform—as revolutionary and counterrevolutionary simultaneously—does to existing ideations of artistic criticality predicated on autonomy. That Blayton's art takes the form of painting—the idiom of reactionary conservatism in the immediate postwar decades—is unimaginable within most treatments of critical art practice after conceptual art, indeed it is usually the constitutive exclusion. This is politically limiting because of the way it shores up the normative boundaries of formal and material capacity, the artist subject it imagines, and the scope and location of her potential influence.[13] It also leaves untouched the ubiquity of painting to the everyday function of social movements which respond to reproductive emergency, leaving the division of modernism and so-called engaged painting intact. A reformist—as in counterrevolutionary—visual language, its figures, colors, and slogans, is left to fester, undisturbed as a domain removed from autonomous artistic production.

Elaborated by Blayton's practice and the vitalist genealogy it mines through its painterly modernism, a Marxist art theory of reform places pressure on the notion of "life" entailed in reproduction. This is because her work blows up the horizon of social reproduction to the scale of population and its administration. "Life" is immediately not only those activities that sustain a single being but a mass and its government. The product "life" entailed in reproduction largely remains, as Marina Vishmidt put it, "in capital's terms," a capture left out of existing social reproduction theory. As part of an always partial opposition, Blayton's painting refracts its invocation of "life" through a history of modernist scrutiny and complication. Thus, Blayton's vitalism complicates

both the natalism implicit in some invocations of social reproduction as well as the sovereignty required by existent explanations of artistic agency. Instead of the "spectral" presence of Hegel's absolute negativity—the total realization of freedom—claimed by some for revolutionary cultural practice, an art theory of reform describes a partial negation, an artist subject enjoying, at best, a delimited freedom. This is an artistic position forfeiting critique in the interest of compromise and conscription toward a macroscale "vitalism." This role is inseparable from artists who embody the flickering nature of autonomy (social and artistic) within capitalism as (only ever) realized through the division of race and gender.[14]

Whither Critical Art? A Brief Review

Explanations for art's political capacity in the twentieth-century West oscillate between notions of direct involvement, extrapolated by postures linked to the historic and New Left avant-gardes, and critical negation, enabled by a resolute embrace of artistic autonomy, usually linked to modernist insularity.[15] It is clear that much of this distinction is dependent on art historical method rather than something intrinsic to the practices themselves, an insight that should buoy a field widely thought to be stagnant. Lambert Zuidervaart has shorthanded this to an "internalist paradigm," which tries "to show how internal tendencies intersect with nonartistic tendencies" and "an externalist paradigm," wherein "agencies outside art are the dominant locus for social mediation."[16] Vishmidt summarized this dichotomy another way as "the standoff between art's 'negative' and 'affirmative' ideological role."[17] With this essay, I propose a new approach to the relationship between artistic negativity, or its suspensive capacity, and the social world. Recent treatises have sought to revive concepts of artistic autonomy's political capacity after the dominance of Rancière's aesthetic philosophy at the turn of the millennium, accounting for artistic involvement in specific activist formations, the terms of contemporary artistic protest and boycott, or to isolate the forms of negation introduced by the "dematerialized" art forms associated with the post-1968 period.[18] In a recent piece, Boris Groys laid out the integral bind of autonomy and engagement, or commitment, in characteristically deadpan prose: "It is not particularly difficult to show that the radical autonomy of art can only be manifested through radical political engagement. And only the artist who is completely free and autonomous can become engaged."[19] This leaves the descriptor "free"—completely free no less—undefined in relation to artists and their practice.

2. Mierle Laderman Ukeles *Washing / Tracks / Maintenance: Outside,* 1973. Part of Maintenance *Art performance* series, 1973-1974. Performance at Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. © Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

Autonomy and Reproduction: Contemporary Counterparts

Within this general field, Kerstin Stakemeier and Vishmidt draw on a Marxist feminist theory of value to revise understanding of how artistic autonomy is socially mediated. They develop a genealogy of the dynamic between autonomy and reproduction from Hegel, Kant, and Adorno to the feminist movements of the 1970s and their associated gestures in art, to define artistic autonomy as dependent on the concrete circumstances of its historical conjecture. They show that "the 'imaginary' of (artistic) autonomy is materially inseparable from the individuated presuppositions of its reproduction."[20] Rather than any prescribed set of aesthetic criteria—whether taken from anything that spans Clement Greenberg's formalism to recent claims of socially engaged or activist practices, or those couched in either dialogue or radical care—autonomy is therein figured as a relation marking the category of art and it is materially reproduced within the overall dynamic of capital. Art is visible because of (laboring) conditions which are not. Its visibility is distinct from devalorized reproductive activity and shores up the maintenance of this separation.

This concept of autonomy shifts the focus from what self-governing art enables one to see about the present's unfreedoms—critical negation in Adorno's formulation—just as it disenables the false declarations, the artistic cos play, of supposed artistic synthesis with life. Instead, art and reproductive labor—categories of "speculative" value production in contemporary capital as immeasurable, unquantifiable, future-oriented activity—are rendered bedfellows:

> if the modern stakes for the autonomy of art had to do with severing itself from productive labour, conceivably to counter a world where mental and manual labour brutalised some and idealised others, the only hope for autonomy in contemporary art is for art to understand itself in relation to reproductive labour.[21]

The argument is grounded in redefining artistic autonomy with respect to political economic change, from an industrial (based in production) to a postindustrial economy. In a Western postindustrial economy, when the borders between self and work have eroded, labor is "immaterial" and oriented away from the assembly line. Art's relation to this is structural: art is an important sector and driver within this kind of economy, and it is an "institution of reproduction—a service, an ambience, a deliberate dissolve between labour and signification."[22] This provides a material basis to art's supposed "dematerialization" after around 1968, providing a foundation upon which its critical negation might be housed; that is, in relation to reproductive rather than industrial labor. In the postindustrial economy, reproductive labor and artistic function have both expanded

their forms and sites of operation and are integrally bound. They are the two poles of "modern capitalist exemption."[23] Both exist in the shadow of the labor theory of value. If modern art "severed" itself from productive labor, then how can we wrest a differentiated artistic figure against a landscape of increasingly ephemeral labor types, many of which are articulated in the language of art and artists?

In relation to economic transition, Stakemeier and Vishmidt propose a concept of artistic autonomy which must "immediately open up onto the prospects for autonomous social activity in general," a coalition won through the aesthetic incorporation of the artwork's enabling conditions.[24] In other words, art that orients itself toward other people's autonomy. Ideally, this maneuver builds capacity with the labor that underpins the visible world.[25] The artworks analyzed begin with canonical feminist examples from the 1960s and 1970s (Lee Lozano, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Mary Kelly, Kay Hunt, and Margaret Harrison) and continue through to recent practices (by James Richards, Ryan Trecartin, and Jana Euler) that excavate technology's relation to reproduction in its dual sense: base reproducibility and in terms of labor and affect.[26] In all these instances, what Stakemeier and Vishmidt narrate is less a medium or set of specific formal markers and rather an artistic posture toward the dominant art of its historical period. Ukeles worked with and against "dematerialized" performance and conceptual art. Richards, within new filmic media, analogue and digital. These works don't share content or medium. Instead, they develop a representational structure that indicates their own enabling conditions and the means of the normative obfuscation of those conditions. They propose, under very different historical conditions, engaged appraisals of reproductive labor without romantic domestication: Ukeles "enacts a re-evaluation, which does not repeat the social naturalisation of reproductive labour but employs the field of art to enact and materialize an absent value form."[27] This feat of representational engineering is enabled by the autonomous ontology of art (as self-legislating) and the freedom of the art institution (fig. 2). Such artworks refer to "autonomous social horizons" beyond themselves but don't yet interface with them, as to do so would rejoin or be absorbed by the indistinguishable march of social maintenance.

The idea of autonomy here is historical and relational to the governing division(s) of labor rather than enabled by the artistic developments of the post-1968 period. Although they primarily seek to revise an Adornian approach for the present economy and contemporary, post-medium art practice, their work can be employed to reassess modernism's "conservative instincts," those naturalized qualities sprung from Enlightenment-era romantic genius that underpin the "norm of uselessness," which stubbornly continues to underwrite vanguard art's critical negation.[28] While rejecting medium specificity enabled Ukeles to place

domestic work on museal display, her performance required a certain autonomy (as singularly authored useless activity framed by the museum) for its critique. Although negatively tied, such artistic invention is set in contrast to the "social remoteness and conservative discursive function" of modernist medium specificity after 1850 or so. Tight-lipped insularity and resolute individuation have confined abstraction, particularly painting, to repeated defenses of its worldly rejection; this is, at best, underpinned by analyses which align its renovated formal language with evolving class structure, and, at worst, a celebration of formal innovation decorated with the new aphorisms of politics.[29]

Adorno, Beethoven, and His Housekeeper: Reproducing Modernism

Instead, by applying a politics of reproduction, modernism's characteristics can be understood as reproduced fictions enabling a denaturalization of the modern era's artistic negativity. Attributes like "singularisation, individuation, expression, self-sufficiency and material exemplariness," among other descriptors for modernism, are mirages of independence buttressed by an "impure," incoherent, differentiated exteriority.[30] We can define this exterior heteronomy, following recent engaged critiques of Adorno such as Fumi Okiji's scholarship, as a racialized, gendered majority, divided by labor category.[31] Such a revelation is certainly part of an artist like Ukeles' decommissioning of authorship, but her formal invention (in performance and conceptual art) restarts the procedure of artistic negativity. What is the politics of reproduction at the helm of this procedure, or in other words, of modern artistic negativity?

One striking passage from the "Culture Industry" chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which grounds this idea in Adorno's thought, contrasts Beethoven with his housekeeper. Adorno and Horkheimer express the authorial presence of Beethoven's contradictory gesture vis-à-vis the market through an imagined demand for a wage made by his housekeeper. The anecdote is surely not unknown to Stakemeier and Vishmidt, if not discussed directly by them, to my knowledge. Appearing about two-thirds into the chapter, the metaphor helps to qualify the kind of autonomy "merely tolerated" or afforded modern art by the "anonymity of the market" in a just bygone, prewar era. This fragile contract between the market and art's autonomy is flattened by the arrival of the "social liquidation of art" in the culture industry, or the new commodity status for works of high art, a "species of commodity" for whom "the business transaction is no longer merely its intention but its sole principle."[32] Beethoven represents how autonomous art operated "throughout bourgeois history" by assuming its independence through this persistent "untruth": condemning or rejecting the market while remaining dependent on it. The housekeeper,

meanwhile, is a figure used to embody the paradox presented by Beethoven's gesture. I quote at length:

> The mortally sick Beethoven, who flung away a novel by Walter Scott with the cry: "The fellow writes for money," while himself proving an extremely experienced and tenacious businessman in commercializing the last quartets—works representing the most extreme repudiation of the market—offers the most grandiose example of the unity of the opposites of market and autonomy in bourgeois art. The artists who succumb to ideology are precisely those who conceal this contradiction instead of assimilating it into the consciousness of their own production, as Beethoven did: he improvised on "Rage over a Lost Penny" and derived the metaphysical injunction "It must be" [*Es Muß Sein*], which seeks aesthetically to annul the world's compulsion by taking that burden onto itself, from his housekeeper's demand for her monthly wages.[33]

Whilst decrying the commodification of art, Beethoven was a shrewd salesman, commercializing artistic products that offered the most stringent rebuke of the market. This posture unifies art and market for financial sustenance while also maintaining, through loud complaint, their opposition or irreducibility. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, Beethoven "assimilated" this contradiction into his caprice for piano, *Rage over a Lost Penny*, reportedly a popular, seemingly lighthearted tune. They argue that the internal logic of the composition—its consciousness—is instituted by dual reliance and opposition between art and economy, or in the analogue of the housekeeper, survival and economy. "The metaphysical injunction, 'it must be'," articulates a subject which assumes the burden—the burden to carry, to articulate, and rearticulate—the mutual indebtedness of freedom of production and market control. The housekeeper is the inspiration, the worldly force, of this subjectivity or its intuitive articulation prior to being elevated to the status of art.

The housekeeper's "demand for her wages" is depicted as an irreconcilable ultimatum, the shadow maestro to Beethoven's grand production. The contradiction contained by the housekeeper, bound to art as its foundational expression, is the same that Wages Against Housework capitalized on eighty years later. The notion of a waged domestic work is aporia: to fully quantify it, even when reproductive work is ostensibly waged, would bankrupt the master of the house, eradicating the livelihood of the servant making the demand in the first place. She is bound up with it. Her vocalized "demand" indicates but also sustains the bind between her limited autonomy and capital, cruelly abbreviated by the wage. In part, Adorno is affirming the givenness of women's labor in the home, in that the housekeeper's demand offsets, in its unlikeliness or unimaginability, Beethoven's ingenuity. In another sense, the passage alienates the housekeeper from the normative scene of her activities, isolating the tenor of her speech—her demand—as the metaphysical basis of artistic freedom.

Here, the critical autonomy of art, its refusal of its own inescapable conditions, is delivered into conceptual being by the voice of a domestic worker. This is a lyrical expression of a structural reality. Beethoven's gesture is dependent on its twinned, subjugated other—the normatively inaudible voice—of his housekeeper for critical acuity, for the full thrust of meaning through metaphor, just as the composer's actual production rested on the labor of her and others. Any claim to autonomy then, any routine invocation of modernism through the signifiers of "singularisation, individuation, expression, self-sufficiency and material exemplariness," mounts an "I," a metaphysical assertion of being, that is always already two voices: the audible treble of the artist, and the undergirding bass of the labor that underpins it. Both are necessary to the articulation of bourgeois artistic autonomy, or modern concepts of autonomy in Stakemeier and Vishmidt's schema, and as contrasted to the culture industry boom in Adorno and Horkheimer's.

Reproductive Modernism: Blayton's Vitalism in Art and State Work

With this multivocal concept of autonomy, artworks fully committed to modernist negation as a contained refusal—a maneuver long suffocated by institutional critique, as one example—are inscribed with another basis, and by extension, another purview. Betty Blayton was making tondo canvases, like *Reaching for Center* (1970, fig. 1), in the mid 1960s and early 1970s, when peers and co-workers like Amiri Baraka, Faith Ringgold, and Benny Andrews fomented dissent through enraged figuration. Blayton's tondos are collage, which marry a "Cubist/Structuralist approach to form," created through an underlying drawing and built-up rice paper collage, with fields of intricate color.[34] In the mid-1960s, Blayton drew on vitalist histories of twentieth-century painting—particularly Orphist color and circular shapes—as a response to then-current approaches in color field application. Rather than soaking or staining canvases directly, like Morris Louis or Helen Frankenthaler, Blayton tinted rice paper, layering it with color wash on the canvas surface. As a formal process, it mines the opposition between gestural and structural approaches to abstraction that characterized the twentieth century. In *Reaching for Center*, a central spine bifurcates the canvas into areas of magenta-red, orange, and yellowed beige, with blue highlights emanating on the canvas's left side. At a distance, the paper overlay is invisible, succumbing to the potency of the color and the shapes' ethereal manifestation. The composition is determinate, yet neither geometric nor exactly expressionistic. Its internal lines—the hazy division between hues—aren't mechanistic, nor are they overtly organic, their angles inhuman enough, sharp and unwavering, to circumvent gesture. Upon closer view, paper, in thin fibrous application and in ripped sections, "builds the structure of the painting," as the artist explained in a 1971 interview.[35]

In this section, I detail Blayton's adherence to modernism in the late 1960s as a position that linked reproductive work and artistic autonomy through their dialectical opposition, which she held in tension through maintaining their separation in her life practice. As a historical example, Blayton provides an instantiation of the politics of reproduction discussed by Stakemeier and Vishmidt within an alternate art historical periodization and view of postindustrial transition. Ultimately, she fleshes out the kind of autonomy articulated by the metaphor of Beethoven's housekeeper, providing the coordinates for a possible art theory of reform.

Blayton made the tondo collages against the tide of both the militantly nationalist Black Arts Movement and the advent of conceptual and performance art. She circulated within these artistic networks, her trajectory rebuffing the narrative of the exclusion of abstract methods from the Black Arts Movement cadre. For example, while she was included in the controversial 1971 *Contemporary Black Artists in America* exhibition at the Whitney Museum, she also dropped out and boycotted it, alongside artists in the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition and abstractionists like Melvin Edwards, Sam Gilliam, and William T. Williams.[36] Through her work at the anti-poverty program HARYOU–ACT (Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited–Associated Community Teams), she began a decades-long community organization process to start two cultural organizations in Harlem, New York that still exist today: the Studio Museum and the Children's Art Carnival, the latter of which she directed for some forty years. She remained uninterested in aesthetic dictum, whether for others or herself, instead operating as a stringent pragmatist. On the controversies that attended the Studio Museum's founding, she reflected:

> I was just trying to make sure that the doors opened, I wanted to make sure that the facility was there and that there was a place and that was my main objective, and it was accomplished. It's taken how many years… seven years to get it to the point where it's actually ready to do something.[37]

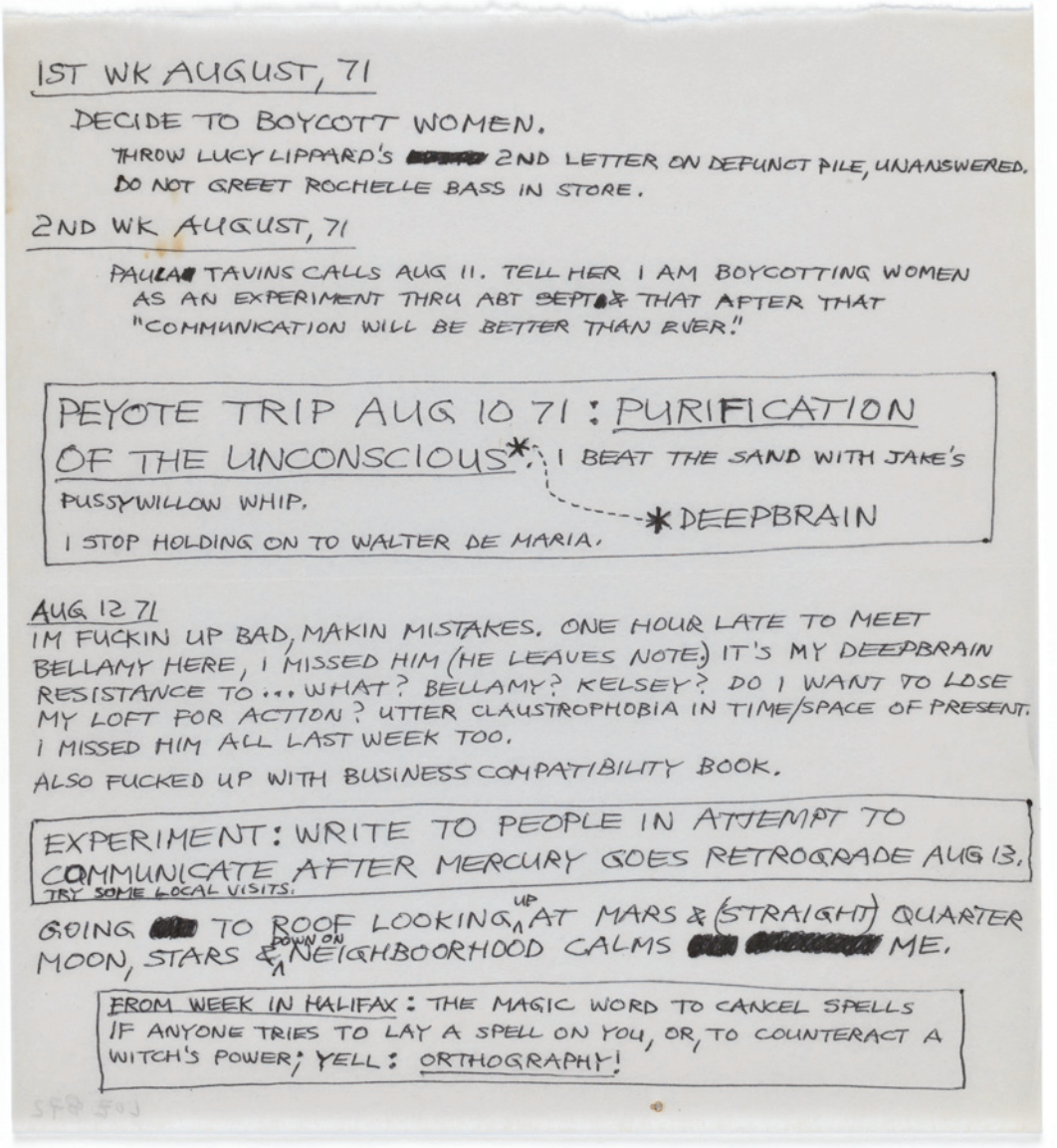
While she kept racial and economic justice at the center of her activities throughout her life, she turned to one side of the separatist nationalisms (Black and Third World) of her peers. She was willing to collaborate with dominant institutions (the Museum of Modern Art, the US federal government) to realize forms of durable institutional autonomy in her lifetime. Blayton pulled resources into a spatially distinct zone and a nested set of institutional frameworks where she had more (never complete) control. These include her illustrious classrooms at the Children's Carnival and HARYOU–ACT, where she was the director of the organization's painting and sculpture unit, and at the Studio Museum, which all operated in the name of supporting Black life. Her focus was trained on cultivating forms of support—whether through patronage

or mutual aid—needed for autonomous space, akin to Federici's discussion of the strategy required for "self-reproducing movements."[38]

Blayton could also be considered what Joy James has theorized as a "Captive Maternal," a subject of "function" rather than identitarian markers who "compromises," enacting forms of "political alchemy" in the interest of Black autonomous zones.[39] The distinction as to whether her labor sustained Black youth and women, providing new outlets of self-expression and the means to participate in them, or served to uphold the bureaucracies of subjugation that provided the means to open her counter institutions, defies stable conclusion. In a dialectical balance, her reform work sacrificed revolutionary purity for limited compliance in the interest of Black vitality. At the same time, her painting placed pressure on the designation "life" within the policy constraints she labored under.

Blayton's activities—within federal welfare and in supplement to its limitations—responded to widespread class decomposition following the closure of the manufacturing industry in New York and across former manufacturing cities in the eastern part of the US.[40] Beginning around 1955, Black workers began to experience the first forms of austerity inaugurated by the postindustrial transition. By 1964, the War on Poverty responded to Black unemployment in urban centers as a civic emergency. The Harlem uprising of 1964 drew 4.4 million in funding for HARYOU–ACT that year.[41] HARYOU–ACT was one of the first anti-poverty programs mounted under Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, it remained one of the largest in the country and it remains a prime example of the tension between control and enfranchisement inherent to midcentury liberal reform. The surplus population governed by institutions like HARYOU–ACT was the negative mass—a figure neither singular nor collective—in excess of both the laid-off factory worker and the new "affective" employee. Blayton's constituents weren't simply displaced from the factory, they were teenagers speculatively unemployable in the new economy. As such, they were a subproletariat class Blayton reproduced for and against the state. In this sense, her labor was removed both from the white collar "affective" typologies emerging at this time, and from the analysis of domestic labor inculcated by movements like Wages for Housework. Indeed, Blayton's activities at HARYOU–ACT were concomitant with the Welfare Rights Movement, a precursor to and inspiration for Wages for Housework.[42]

From this location—from within and against welfare work—Blayton made color field abstraction. Rather than reactionary, this responded to the relations of her total labor, just as Ukeles did from another vantage point. As Stakemeier and Vishmidt set out, it's not a linear evolution of medium foreclosure that enables a politics of reproduction (it's not simply immaterial art) but rather a practice


1ST WK AUGUST, 71

DECIDE TO BOYCOTT WOMEN.

THROW LUCY LIPPARD'S [redacted] 2ND LETTER ON DEFUNCT PILE, UNANSWERED.
DO NOT GREET ROCHELLE BASS IN STORE.

2ND WK AUGUST, 71

PAULA[redacted] TAVINS CALLS AUG 11. TELL HER I AM BOYCOTTING WOMEN AS AN EXPERIMENT THRU ABT SEPT[redacted] & THAT AFTER THAT "COMMUNICATION WILL BE BETTER THAN EVER."

PEYOTE TRIP AUG 10 71 : PURIFICATION OF THE UNCONSCIOUS* : I BEAT THE SAND WITH JAKE'S PUSSYWILLOW WHIP.
I STOP HOLDING ON TO WALTER DE MARIA.
*DEEPBRAIN

AUG 12 71
IM FUCKIN UP BAD, MAKIN MISTAKES. ONE HOUR LATE TO MEET BELLAMY HERE, I MISSED HIM (HE LEAVES NOTE.) IT'S MY DEEPBRAIN RESISTANCE TO ... WHAT? BELLAMY? KELSEY? DO I WANT TO LOSE MY LOFT FOR ACTION? UTTER CLAUSTROPHOBIA IN TIME/SPACE OF PRESENT.
I MISSED HIM ALL LAST WEEK TOO.
ALSO FUCKED UP WITH BUSINESS COMPATIBILITY BOOK.

EXPERIMENT: WRITE TO PEOPLE IN ATTEMPT TO COMMUNICATE AFTER MERCURY GOES RETROGRADE AUG 13.
TRY SOME LOCAL VISITS.

GOING [redacted] TO ROOF LOOKING UP AT MARS & (STRAIGHT) QUARTER MOON, STARS & DOWN ON NEIGHBOORHOOD CALMS [redacted] ME.

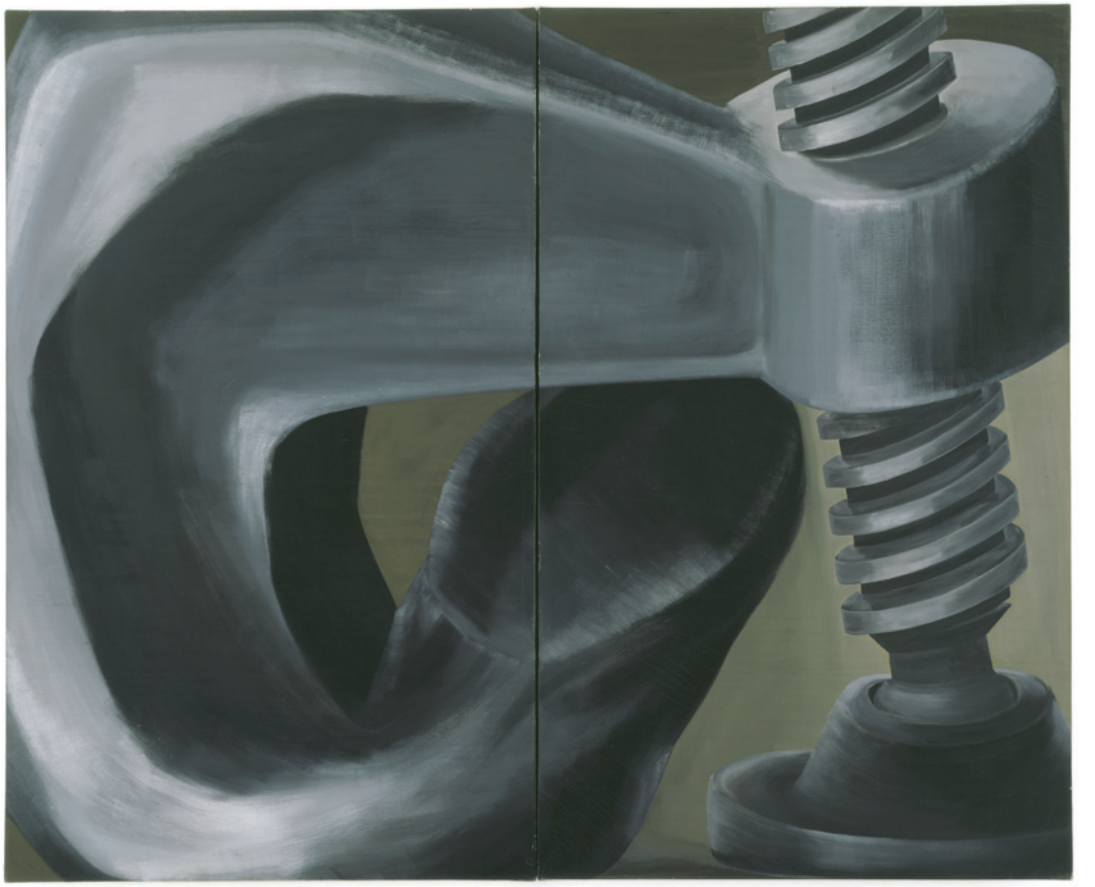
FROM WEEK IN HALIFAX : THE MAGIC WORD TO CANCEL SPELLS IF ANYONE TRIES TO LAY A SPELL ON YOU, OR, TO COUNTERACT A WITCH'S POWER; YELL : ORTHOGRAPHY!

3. Lee Lozano, no title, 1971. Ink on paper, 23.3 × 21.5 cm (9 1/8 × 8 1/2 inches). © The Estate of Lee Lozano. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Barbora Gerny.

which "transcends (its) seemingly 'pure' object appearance."[43] This destabilization is where art can "expand ties of solidarity with the reproductive structures inherent to it." In the case of Lozano and Ukeles, their live art—on domestic work and the category of "woman"—breached the mandate for spectacularization, instead instituting everyday rhythms. In Lozano's case these included works like her untitled 1971 work (often referred to as "Boycott Women"; fig. 3), in which the artist stopped talking to other women for several decades, quietly seeking to abolish the category, if in a neoconservative, impoverished gesture. Lozano's paintings undercut the conventions of minimalist abstraction in blunt figuration of domestic objects (fig. 4), which also referenced the dominance of monumental scale at that time. These artworks arrived at their partnership with "reproductive structure"—in this case, domestic work in the home, and the political economic function of (white) female subjectivity—through the exposure of naturalized constraints in their working medium or genre.

The so-called "aesthetic of administration" (which Ukeles and Lozano operated in) described only part of the postwar economic transition. Surplus populations and the crisis of their reformation for the new economy are the other half of this history. It was against this reality that Blayton created a painterly surface that presented color sensuousness as an illusion dependent on an underlying structure, in this case a built-up skeleton of fragmented paper. The surface imparted ethereal fullness, and the unbounded experience of color important to vitalist abstraction, while it revealed a partially submerged structure shown to enable that aesthetic transportation. Wrapped up in this move, the humanist-organic categories imbued in color vitalism—essence, "liveness," biomorphic allusion—are rendered appearances dependent on a partially visible architecture.[44] The tondo surfaces refuse separation between appearance and enabling system—they are one and the same, color and paper tissue (appearance and structure) indissociable from one another through her layering process. Her surface therefore resists the causality that haunts social reproduction theory, rather presenting a dynamic between liveness or "living" color and the substance—at once a sense of force and material infrastructure—facilitating its realization.

Blayton's tondos responded to dynamics within color field painting, just as Lozano and Ukeles worked against performance, conceptual art, and minimalism. Circa 1965, color field painting reasserted the primacy of "open form" within a long opposition in two-dimensional abstraction between structure and expression. Greenberg enforced this teleology at the turn of the 1960s in declaring that Heinrich Wölfflin's categories, "the linear" and "the painterly," continued to be useful.[45] Rosalind Krauss summarizes this view in her depiction of color field painting as resistance to "the violence of a hardened contour."[46] Blayton's work upends the notion of freedom presupposed by the



4. Lee Lozano, no title, 1964. Oil on canvas, two panels, 275.2 × 336.5 × 5.2 cm (108 3/8 × 132 1/2 × 2 inches). *The Cleveland Museum of Art, Scott Mueller Collection 2.2021. © The Estate of Lee Lozano. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth.

discourse of unobstructed color, positing that the appearance of liberated form requires a laborious foundation. Sketching a contained composition in pencil or chalk on the canvas surface, she embedded and vanished its line through layering rice paper strips and shapes with watery layers of color wash and adhesive. During the layering process, she would use more opaque color, more opaque paint or oil crayon, to generate the radiant, seemingly floating, undulations in tone. This surface work—or support work—is comparable to the use of wash, collage, texturizing, staining, and other "involvements with surface" in the post-painterly era.[47] It gives the lie to the allegories of freedom and resistance entailed in art histories of abstraction: color, rather than free, is determined by the specific conditions of a support surface, and it is with that structure that Blayton delved, creating images which partially revealed the terms of their appearance.

Blayton's engagement with a painterly history of vitalism must be perceived against the management of life undertaken, not only in her work at HARYOU, but by the entire welfare state apparatus surrounding Black urban populations at this juncture. Blayton's canvases utilized modernist autonomy to engage metaphysical questions about the agentive indeterminacy of being in the context of a state infrastructure that, in part, improved people's life chances while delimiting their potential activity, as an anti-riot program. While she responded to the developments of color field painting in the 1960s, she set the terms of her inquiry within the framework of early twentieth-century spiritualism rather than indifferent opticality, seeking not the pure physiological nature of color perception but the impact of her specific isolation of color, at the expense of a support structure, on a viewers' internal inquiry into the nature of being, "becoming," and the "stages of being." This metaphysical speculation placed her at odds with the material inquiry so key to paintings' legitimacy in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, for Blayton, "using the circle as a basic form for painting is symbolic" for the "never ending renewal of life."[48] The point here is not to locate a systematic metaphysics but to grasp the basis of her color field production in early twentieth-century abstraction's spiritualist vitalism.

Blayton's surfaces refuted the capture of life and "development" simultaneously undertaken in her state work. Unlike Ukeles or other white feminists in this period, any illusion to domestic work, or "women" as a category of worker, such as those in Kelly, Hunt, and Harrison's *Women and Work*, cannot describe the larger state management Blayton was involved in as an administrator. Her state endeavors engaged with racial and economic justice, and their inevitable intersection with gender, but she did not use the language of feminism. Her work was reproductive—it created conditions favorable to life and remaining alive—but on a scale and in a location removed from white feminist discourses around gendered labor. Like Stakemeier and Vishmidt's analysis of Ukeles and

Lozano, Blayton confronted the terms of her worldly labor—state reform—with an internal critique of a specified medium. By drawing on a history of vitalism available within modernism, she grasped the object of state interest and control while simultaneously disallowing the representation of individual freedom embedded in color field expressionism. In so doing, she offers the temporary release—through perceptual engagement—of questions of life and being from the possessive individualism endemic to modernism and the state.

An Art Theory of Reform: Autonomy without Critique

There was a separation of practice—between state work and artistic labor—at issue in Blayton's commitment to two-dimensions that conversely could be collapsed in performance-based experiments. Some might read Stakemeier and Vishmidt's passage on "pure object appearance" to mean, literally, the transgression of the art object as such, as is more imaginable in performance, although they specify the artwork need not be immaterial. However, painting remains an insurmountable object, one seemingly, at its critical best, able only to embrace the resolute rejection of the world within the limits of the canvas. This self-isolation succumbs to what John Roberts diagnosed as a "melancholic allure":

> whatever tales of formal complexity might be spun from painting's recent histories, it cannot have any heteronomous purchase on the extra-artistic. All it can provide structurally is a melancholic allure in which the debilitated zones of "personal creativity" are offered as a resistance to theory and a resistance to political praxis.[49]

Given Roberts theorizes a revived avant-garde, the exclusion of painting is to be expected. However, Blayton and her scene of labor indicates the limit of what is invoked in "heteronomous purchase" and "extra artistic" action here, and the political economic coordinates underlying them. Blayton remained committed to painting—within her overall praxis—for several reasons, none of which conform to the image of romantic futility assumed in Robert's model. The enduring autonomy of painting—inescapable in her color field tondos—was useful against her state work, as something that contained a history of representation unassimilable to the visual forms of welfare. Modernism allowed her to access a history of vitalism, prying at the definition of "life" at the center of her state work. Abstraction accessed life force to one side of depiction as such, without the constraints of individual or collective body ideations, which could not be delivered through the figures of performance or the measured formulas of conceptual art.

More precisely, perhaps, unlike Ukeles or Lozano, the heteronomous terrain Blayton confronted wasn't a positive sense of transition in the economy: that of so-called "affective labor," or the markers of "dematerialization." As such, the potency of those genres, extending out against new configurations of postindustrial labor, was irrelevant within her situation, which both foreshadowed and was left out of the transition to post-Fordism. Given the theorization of surplus life within her invocation of vitalism on the one hand, and the world-building force of her organizing on the other, she is plainly undescribed by Roberts's allusion to a romantic painter, shying from theory or praxis. What the shape of intervention might be here is the main divergence presented by Blayton's reform, a difference in orientation to Roberts's proposal of time-bound praxis governed by another view of postindustrial impact and the subjects corralled by it. Her engagement in the "heteronomous" is imperceptible, uncapturable, because it proceeded by minute compromises across a longue durée. Her paintings are both belated, as a record or trail of this activity, and provision an alternate future metaphysics, or way toward a new "I." Like the "living labor" she worked with, her paintings remain outside of the present relations of production she mitigated against. That she might resurrect "personal creativity" at the margins of the US state, would, even in its capitulations to humanist reason, mean something other than the painter assumed in Roberts's dismissal. This is because the populations she worked for and with are subjects historically excluded from the category of human, a trajectory beginning in slavery that, by 1968, had culminated in a "surplus" population.[50]

Blayton's maintenance of a bifurcated practice—state work and modernist art making, as two parallel labors—institutes a remove from artistic claims of "heteronomous purchase." This is a specific iteration, and reformulation, of the critical claim that autonomous art must persist as long as capitalism does.[51] Her tondos bore no claim of purchase on the social world she transformed in administrative increment, a twofold practice which silently refutes the idea of artistic intervention. Instead, Blayton placed her art in relation to reproduction where "the two fed one another" contained to their structural realms.[52]

Blayton's double practice was akin to the labor of other artist mothers in the same period, all of whom—Blayton, Ukeles, Kelly—migrated reproductive work into their art. But by refusing the collapse between these two forms of work, as is evident in a piece like *Post-partum Document* (1973–79), for example, Blayton resuscitated the dual voice of autonomy: creator and imperceptible laborer, Beethoven and domestic worker. She occupied both positions simultaneously. That her art was realized in a high modernist form, striking a soluble contrast with the rest of her labor, manifested this dual-voiced autonomy. While recognition of her state work is an incorporation of social history, her canvases mirror or cite the relationship between sub-structure and

appearance through their form. This acceptance and exposure of two mutually constitutive realities—artwork and reproductive labor, social autonomy and its conditions—without attempting to collapse or resolve them recognizes unfreedom in the present. It holds the space between artistic freedom and heteronomous nonappearance up for scrutiny through the maintenance of this arduous parallel practice. Suspending the dialectic between art and reproduction, Blayton refused the consolation provided by their temporary collapse, the momentary, righteous comfort of their integration. What she traded for the temporary reconciliation seen in period feminist works is a sustained recognition of their determining opposition in the present, and the unbreachable, painful distance separating them.

As such, Blayton voices the split subject characterized by Adorno as the basis of bourgeois autonomy: a subject burdened to embody the fact of freedom's basis in everyday toil. By indicating her worldly labor in painterly form, Blayton holds up autonomy as an unrealized ideal in the present, positing that only a metaphysical transformation—new being in another social order—could reconcile the contradiction tendered. This posture is distinct from existent concepts of critical negativity in the way it splits or multiplies the artist-subject and the tracts of her production. Even where it foments a critique of bourgeois autonomy and the illusion of artistic freedom, such a revelation is undercut or sidelined by compromise in the interest of supporting life, whether the forward march of social work or the problems attending an embrace of spiritualist doctrine. This split artist-subject—one proffering an autonomous artwork while indicating and undertaking the labor that sustains its visibility—generates an incomplete negation, one never fully vested in soluble critique. An art theory of reform describes an artistic posture split between visible gesture and its conditions, oriented towards "an autonomy with a general, socialized horizon" over and against its own sovereignty. In accepting this relative invisibility, it risks the slander "reform or reformist." An art theory of reform describes the production and reflection on autonomy in those practices that aim to develop it for others. Their negativity resides not in a recognizable critical distance or wholeness but in a partial realization achieved through artistic citation of an autonomous formal ideal, and in a split subject who risks imperceptibility through concession.

NOTES

1 Kerstin Stakemeier and Marina Vishmidt, “Reproducing Autonomy,” in Kerstin Stakemeier and Marina Vishmidt, *Reproducing Autonomy: Work, Money, Crisis and Contemporary Art* (Mute, 2016), 67–68; on this idea, see also Marina Vishmidt and Sven Lütticken, “Genealogies of Autonomy,” *e-flux* 149 (November 2024), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/149/637373/genealogiesof-autonomy/.

2 Victoria Horne, “The Art of Social Reproduction,” *The Journal of Visual Culture* 15, no. 2 (2016): 179–202; Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd, “Social Reproduction Struggles and Art History: An Introduction,” *Third Text* 31, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 1–14.

3 Jacopo Galimberti, *Images of Class: Operaismo, Autonomia and the Visual Arts (1962–1988)* (Verso, 2022).

4 John Roberts has helpfully articulated a dialectic between “post-Constructivist” practices which “intervene […] displace, dis-articulate and denaturalize, occupy” with the need for art to maintain a space of “autonomy and non-compliance.” John Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde* (Verso, 2015), 195. Revised accounts (of art after 2000, for example, or socially engaged art) largely conform with an idea of political aesthetics described by this list of synonyms, see Grant H. Kester, *Beyond the Sovereign Self: Aesthetic Autonomy from the Avant-Garde to Socially Engaged Art* (Duke University Press, 2023), 2–3; or the “radical departure” from medium specificity in the case of socially engaged art in Leigh Claire La Berge, *Wages Against Artwork: Decommodified Labor and the Claims of Socially Engaged Art* (Duke University Press, 2019), 45.

5 Roberts, *Revolutionary Time*, 35.

6 Kester, for example, mounts an idea of art’s role in political transformation against the “mythos of total revolution,” absent an analysis of capital. Kester, *Beyond the Sovereign Self*, 105.

7 Rosa Luxemburg, “Introduction,” in *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg: Reform or Revolution and the Mass Strike*, ed. Helen Scott (Haymarket Books, 2008), 41.

8 Rosa Luxemburg, “Chapter one: The Opportunist method,” in Scott, *Essential Rosa Luxemburg*, 43.

9 Luxemburg, “Introduction,” 43.

10 Saidiya Hartman, “Crow Jane Makes a Modest Proposal,” *n+1* (August 22, 2024), https://www.nplusonemag.com/issue-48/politics/crow-jane-makes-a-modest-proposal/.

11 This idea of “autonomizing” practice within existing social relations is described across Federici’s oeuvre. See Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (PM Press, 2012).

12 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (University of California Press, 2007), 242.

13 Roberts, for example, universally excludes painting from art’s “conceptual self-articulation” after roughly 1945. Roberts, *Revolutionary Time*, 2.

14 Another approach to the terms of Blayton’s critical negativity would be through Black studies, such as recent important theorizations of abstraction by Fred Moten and Phillip Brian Harper. In this short essay for this special issue, I aim to outline Blayton’s reform work against existing treatments of artistic critique in Left and Marxian art history and theory, in part because Blayton’s work conforms closely to theories of social reproduction in art and about artists, but I note that my frame here is incomplete. See Fred Moten, “The Sentimental Avant-Garde,” *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 25–84; Phillip Brian Harper, *Abstractionist Aesthetics: Artistic Form and Social Critique in African American Culture* (New York University Press, 2015).

15 Bergs points out this is an overly simplified summary, still in use as a shorthand in recent literature: Steyn Bergs, “Against Autonomy as Idea,” *Radical Philosophy* 217 (Winter 2024): 97–100, https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/reviews/against-autonomy-as-idea.

16 Lambert Zuidervaart, “The Social Significance of Autonomous Art,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 48, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 62.

17 Marina Vishmidt, “What Do We Mean By ‘Autonomy’ and ‘Reproduction’?” in Stakemeier and Vishmidt, *Reproducing Autonomy*, 37.

18 Peter Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition: Critical Essays* (Verso, 2018); Sven Lütticken, *Cultural Revolution: Aesthetic Practice After Autonomy* (Sternberg Press, 2017); Roberts, *Revolutionary Time*, 220.

19 Boris Groys, “Trotsky, or Metamorphoses of Engagement,” *e-flux* 111, September 2020, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/111/343619/trotsky-or-metamorphoses-of-engagement/.

20 Stakemeier and Vishmidt, “Reproducing Autonomy,” 63.

21 Vishmidt, “What Do We Mean,” 47.

22 Vishmidt, “What Do We Mean,” 47.

23 Stakemeier and Vishmidt, “Reproducing Autonomy,” 66.

24 Vishmidt, “What Do We Mean,” 47.

25 Vishmidt, “What Do We Mean,” 47.

26 Stakemeier and Vishmidt, “Reproducing Autonomy,” 98.

27 Stakemeier and Vishmidt, “Reproducing Autonomy,” 89.

28 Vishmidt, “What Do We Mean,” 46.

29 Stakemeier, “(Not) More Autonomy,” in Stakemeier and Vishmidt, *Reproducing Autonomy*, 28. Clark’s defense of abstract expressionism is an example of the former, see T. J. Clark, “In Defense of Abstract Expressionism,” *October* 69 (1994): 23–48. Recent literature on abstraction by Black and queer artists, in academic as well as popular outlets, provides numerous examples of the latter.

30 Stakemeier and Vishmidt, “Reproducing Autonomy,” 66; Vishmidt, “What Do We Mean,” 33.

31 See, in particular, Fumi Okiji, *Jazz as Critique: Adorno and Black Expression Revisited* (Stanford University Press, 2018), 31–48.

32 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, 2002), 128.

33 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 127.

34 Lowery Stokes Sims, "Betty Blayton: Plastic Language and Metaphysical Understanding," in *Betty Blayton: In Search of Grace* (Mnuchin Gallery, 2021), 10.

35 Betty Blayton, interview in *Five African American Artists*, film, prod. Milton Meltzen and Alvin Yudkoff (Seagram Distillers, 1971).

36 Susan E. Cahan, *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power* (Duke University Press, 2016), 149–50.

37 Betty Blayton, interview with Camille Billops, January 20, 1976, Audio-visual recording, Billops–Hatch Archives, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA.

38 Silvia Federici, "Precarious Labor: A Feminist Viewpoint," Lecture, October 28, 2006, New York City, https://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com/precarious-labor-a-feminist-viewpoint/.

39 Joy James, "The Captive Maternal Is a Function Not an Identity Marker," *Scalawag Magazine* (April 29, 2023), https://scalawagmagazine.org/2023/04/captive-maternal-joy-james/.

40 Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), 91–93, 95–96, quotes at 2, 94; Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (Vintage, 1993), 200.

41 Sydney Schanberg, "HARYOU WILL GET; U.S. AND CITY FUND OF $4.4 MILLION; Contract Is Ready to Be Signed to Begin Program of Harlem Youth Aid," *The New York Times*, August 26, 1964, sec. Archives, https://www.nytimes.com/1964/08/26/archives/haryou-will-get-us-and-city-fund-of-44-million-contract-is-ready-to.html. For an overview of HARYOU–ACT's founding and early years see the relevant chapters in Noel A. Cazenave, *Impossible Democracy: The Unlikely Success of the War on Poverty Community Action Programs* (State University of New York Press, 2007).

42 Blayton did not self-identify as a socialist or a feminist. Premilla Nadasen writes of the identities of welfare rights activists whose "brand of radicalism […] differed from what many people—black and white—articulated. They adopted political positions based on a material understanding of the hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality and the way in which these realities were intertwined and inseparable for all people." See Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (Routledge, 2004), xvii–xviii. The Welfare Rights movement emerged from War on Poverty community action programs such as HARYOU; see Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, "The Welfare Rights Movement," in *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (Pantheon, 1977), 264–362. Federici cites the Welfare Rights Movement in Marina Vishmidt, "Permanent Reproductive Crisis: An Interview with Silvia Federici," *Mute*, March 7, 2013, https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/permanent-reproductive-crisis-interview-silvia-federici.

43 Stakemeier and Vishmidt, "Reproducing Autonomy," 71. All quotations in this paragraph.

44 Blayton drew on the vitalist rhetoric present in Orphism as a precursor to her color abstraction. For example, Robert Delaunay, "Notes on Orphism," in *Colour*, ed. David Batchelor (MIT Press and Whitechapel Gallery, 2008), 89.

45 Clement Greenberg, "Post Painterly Abstraction," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 4, Modernism with a Vengeance,* ed. John O'Brian (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 192.

46 Rosalind Krauss, "'Specific' Objects," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 46 (Autumn 2004): 223.

47 Kellie Jones, "To the Max: Energy and Experimentation," in *Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction 1964–1980* (Studio Museum in Harlem, 2006), 21.

48 Blayton, interview in *Five African American Artists.* All quotations in this paragraph.

49 Roberts, *Revolutionary Time*, 2.

50 For more on this, see Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*, 214. Between 1940 and 1945, six million people migrated from the south to northern cities to enter manufacturing work.

51 A variant of this argument appears in texts by Roberts, Adorno, and others.

52 Betty Blayton for the *Magnetic Fields* exhibition, interview by Erin Dziedzic and Melissa Messina, June 2016, audio-visual recording, copy in the author's possession.