

Abstract Animation, Conceptual Art, and Don Delillo's *Underworld*: collectibles and non-collectibles in art

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“These materials have no esthetic interest. They are discolored and crumbling. Old paper, that’s all it is. My customers come here largely for the clutter and mess. It’s a history they’re part of.” (Don Delillo, *Underworld*, p.322)

Delillo's *Underworld*:

Don Delillo is one of the most celebrated contemporary American novelists. Of his numerous works *Underworld* (1997) is arguably his most ambitious. The title “underworld” is a metaphor for many things that appear in the novel, among them, the underground nuclear waste, the graffiti artist who lives and works in the NY subway system, the mafia underworld that is alleged (by one of the main characters) to have infiltrated the waste management industry, the desolate urban landscape of the Bronx with its population of underclass dwellers, and the part of the Cold War history that is still classified and therefore only surfaces as rumors. In other words, the “underworld” stands for things hidden, buried underground either because they are disagreeable, filthy, dangerous or criminal but nevertheless unavoidable in every society. The novel is also about the capitalist economy that works as a lubricant to turn such waste into money. One of the main characters, Nick Shay, is an executive of a waste management company. Waste management is a growth industry in today’s capitalist world. In the capitalist economy waste is a commodity like anything else. (The diversified Bill Gates is said to have a stake in one major waste management company. Or is it just a rumor?)

The lines quoted at the beginning of this paper are from one of the minor char-

acters in the novel. *Underworld* depicts the latter half of 20th century American history through the eyes of myriads of characters, some historical and others fictional. The character in question is Tommy Chan, the owner of a baseball memorabilia store in San Francisco. Delillo describes him through another character as “the first collector I found anywhere west of Pittsburgh.” Chan’s philosophical self-reflexive bent allows him to crack a telling remark about the dilapidated physical conditions of his store: “The revenge of popular culture on those who take it seriously.” (p.323) His merchandise is essentially a mass of crumbling old paper. Without the added value as a collectible it is nothing but a breeding ground for mildew and fungus. In a sense he is in a waste management business like Nick Shay’s.

It is close to impossible to summarize the “plot” of this eight hundred page novel and its tens of characters. For a start, there exists no single chronological thread of narrative. The novel moves along like a film backward and forward with many characters coming in and out of focus. One way of describing its plot, then, is perhaps by drawing a contrast between some of the major characters. In the context of this paper, the contrast between two characters, Cotter and Klara Sax may be illuminating. Cotter is the first character in the novel. He is a black middle school boy from the Bronx who cuts school to be at the last game of the 1951 National League penant race, in which the Brooklyn Dodgers, the leader for most of the race, lost to the NY Giants by Bobby Thompson’s homerun, the “shot heard across the world.” Cotter scrambles to get the winning ball and brings it back home, but his father, strapped for food money gives it away to an advertising executive for a piddling sum (Ironically the executive was standing in line with his son outside the Yankee stadium to buy tickets for the coming subway series.) The executive bought it for his son, but many years later he loses it mainly because he does not share his father’s passion for the history of the game.

Klara Sax, nee Klara Sachs, is a conceptual artist of sorts. Although she too is a native of the Bronx she has a significant headstart over Cotter simply by being white. By the 90s she has had ups and downs in her career and a couple of failed marriages. Finally in the early 90s she embarks on a career-salvaging work on a massive scale. The work consists of a display (or “installation” a commonly used term in contemporary art) in an Arizona desert of repainted outdated war planes, junk memorabilia from the Cold War era. Due to the sheer physical scale of this work, visitors need to ride on a hot air balloon to see it. An art critic might classify it as “Land art” because it needs to be placed in a landscape, which forms an inte-

gral part of the work. The term conceptual art may also apply because this work by Sax seems to be making a political statement about the Cold War. In any case, Cotter fails to cash in on his rare find, while the savvy Sax succeeds in making a lucrative career out of recycling useless junk. This work by Sax leads to her third marriage with a wealthy German art dealer, with which the novel ends rather anti-climactically. After reading the massive 800 page plus novel by DeLillo the reader comes to realize that Klara is a smooth operator in the high finance art world, whereas Cotter is a clueless victim of the system whose only saving grace is a "shine in his eye that's halfway hopeful," which DeLillo describes as "American" (the opening line of the novel). The reader is never told what kind of life Cotter, a contemporary of Klara Sax, lived since his childhood. The narrative of his life ends when he loses control of Frank Thompson's winning ball. In other words, Klara is a winner and Cotter a loser. The last essaylike section of DeLillo's novel is aptly entitled "Das Kapital". By this gesture the author clearly intends to show his reader the mechanism by which capitalism transforms junk into a highly valued commodity. It's a magic of excess capital seeking refuge in a collectible, the magic of conceptual art.

Art animation:

At the 1998 Hiroshima International Animation Festival Michael Salkeld's *Heavy Stock* was awarded a "special prize" (or tokubetsusho). *Heavy Stock* is an extremely complex work of 3D animation of abstract geometric shapes with very little narrative or sense of direction to speak of. As the title suggests we can interpret it as depicting the movement of railroad cars but its visual content is abstract enough to allow the viewer to see something entirely different. It is certainly not the type of film popularly associated with the word animation, an animated cartoon with characters and a story. Despite such a popular misconception about the art of animation, a small number of artistically sophisticated films like *Heavy Stock* are being made today. Particularly noteworthy about this film is the equally complex orchestral score composed by Salkeld himself that is synchronized with the visuals. Unfortunately, the work is marred by a low budget look incongruent with the high level of artistry, the most obvious example of which is the score that is not performed by a real orchestra but created by a computer program designed to serve as its substitute. It is clear that Salkeld would have preferred to shoot the film on a

larger format and hired a full orchestra had money been no object. Nevertheless, his artistic vision and the problem solving skills involved to achieve it should impress most viewers. He might also have written the software program that moves all the geometrical shapes across and around the screen synchronous with the music. An artist with a similar vision but endowed with less technical skills might have opted for the less high tech but equally labor intensive approach of painting each and every frame.

After watching *Heavy Stock* one may wonder who this amazing talent is and be tempted to do a web search on him. Or an index search of academic journals. Unfortunately such an effort ends up with not a single paragraph on him as of the year 2000. A search on similarly multi-talented artists like Alwin Nikolais produces quite a long list of mentions in various places. Nikolais is generally known as a choreographer but it would be more accurate to describe him as an audio-visual artist or, in more traditional terms, a creator of Gesamtkunstwerk. His works like Salkeld's, are characterized by a strong interest in the physical movement of abstract and geometrical shapes and colors. Nikolais tried to achieve this in real time on stage, while Salkeld took an indirect approach via the medium of film. Both of them were/ are talented composers and wrote music to accompany their visuals. In Nikolais' case he also created every other aspect of his work, from the dancers' costumes, set designs, to dance choreography. Although relatively unknown by the general public despite his genius, Nikolais is considered by his peers a preeminent choreographer and has been awarded the highest honors by both American and French governments. ("DM", Nov. 1990, p.48) Salkeld on the other hand is working in isolation from other artists, a case not uncommon with non commercial animators, and his works are rarely seen except at animation festivals like the Hiroshima biennial.

Salkeld and Nikolais are not alone in their interest in bringing the static two dimensional abstract art to life. Practically every modernist painter of the early 20th century imagined movement in the canvasses they painted. Picasso, Duchamp, Kandinsky, Hans Richter, Fernand Leger, and Man Ray come to mind. Among our contemporaries Paul Glabicki, Thomas Renolder and Amy Kravitz are notable animators who are trying to find ways to infuse movement and music into shapes and colors. In Duchamp' famous abstract painting *Nude descending a staircase*, one would be hard pressed not to see movement. Similarly Kandisky's interest in animating his abstract paintings led him to abstract/ constructivist theater: during his

residency at Bauhaus he sought help from Paul Klee's son and other associates to act as movers inside stage props in various shapes and colors, and their movement was choreographed to the music of Mussorgsky (1928) (*Kandinsky*, p. 69–72). In this sense he was a precursor of artists like Nikolais. One work by Nikolais for instance uses the arms (but not the torsos of dancers) and the lighting projected on them to present a visual dance of complex colors. The viewer's attention is not primarily focused on the arms as much as on the movement of the colors reflected on them, just as the performers on stage in Kandinsky's piece are simply the motors so to speak for moving the geometric shapes. If one removes every human element from this process of presenting colors and shapes by mechanizing it, one is left with an animated film like Salkeld's *Heavy Stock* or its predecessors such as Hans Richter, Walter Ruttmann, Viking Eggeling, and Fernand Leger.

Of the four artists listed immediately above, Fernand Leger is probably the best known because he was active primarily as a painter in Paris at a time when Paris was the world center of visual arts and being a visual artist meant being a painter. The other three worked primarily in cinema, the cutting edge at the time but unfortunately an incomplete one due to lack of color. Less known is the fact that Leger also made a short film, lasting approximately a quarter of an hour, which contained some sequences of animation. This film, entitled *Ballet Mecanique* (1924), was a natural conclusion for Cubists like him who were fascinated by machines, a symbol of modernism. For a two-dimensional artist to go one step further by adding the dimension of time is only logical if he or she is an innovator. Certainly Leger was an innovator in his day. And his sense of innovation was inspired by contemporaries who had already made intriguing experimental animations, including Hans Richter (*Rhythm 21, 23*: 1921, 1923), Viking Eggeling (*Diagonal Symphony*, 1921), and Walter Ruttmann (*Opus III*, ca. 1923).

Despite the obvious artistic merits of these animated works they are not widely available and only a few specialists interested in the subject ever get to see them at a limited number of elite film libraries in the world. This situation makes a sharp and interesting contrast with the ever-increasing popularity of modern art museums around the world that routinely exhibit the avant-garde works of almost a century ago and enjoy a constant flow of visitors. Although not as famous as Picasso, Fernand Leger is a well known artist whose paintings are prominently displayed in art museums. His animated film, on the other hand, is rarely shown to the public. This paper is an attempt to explain the reasons for this unequal treatment of differ-

ent art forms.

Conceptual Art:

It is not easy to define what is referred to as “conceptual art”. The common denominator lies in the word “concept” or “idea” but any form, material or style may be used to convey that “concept”. In some cases for example conceptual art relies on language to the extent that some regard such work as indistinguishable from literature like a certain type of poetry. One wonders in such a case why it belongs in an art museum instead of in a book. In the minds of many, conceptual art is a blanket term that refers to the “anything goes” type of art that has erupted in several bursts in various parts of the world since the Dada movement in the 1910s (Fluxus, the Neo Dada of the 50s in Japan, etc). If such is the case, one wonders why it is not called Dada but is instead given the fancy new name of conceptual art. The term Dada is inclusive enough (it is supposed to include everything that is anti-art); if one invents a new category that encompasses it, then the new category of conceptual art can mean almost anything.

I consider all these attempts at definition somewhat self-serving, because they seem to be good only for marketing purposes: the art form is extremely amorphous, but it needs a catchy name in order to attract attention and of course buyers. As Duke Ellington says about music, ultimately there exist only two types of art: good art and bad art. Everything else can be done without. And yet, for the sake of argument, it would be interesting to accept the terminology and compare the Duchampian readymade, which is widely regarded as the forerunner of conceptual art, with the kind of abstract animation discussed above. Such a comparison is actually not so farfetched because Duchamp is not only often cited as the founder of conceptual art but he also made an animated film (*Anemic Cinema*, 1926) in collaboration with Hans Richter.

The difference between the two art forms is obvious. In the case of a readymade no craft or problem solving skills are involved in materializing the artist’s vision. All he or she has to do is to transport the physical object to a gallery or a museum and give it a title. A ten minute animated short, on the other hand, may require several years of laborious work and most definitely the brain power to solve practical problems that the artist is bound to encounter on a daily basis. Financial remuneration

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neration may vastly differ: Duchamp died relatively wealthy; Salkeld cannot expect to make much money on his films.

We may be tempted to ask: Why such inequality? Why such unfairness? Is this yet another example of how unfair life is? Asking these questions may be inevitable, but more important is to consider how various art forms are perceived and consumed under different types of economic systems. Art does not exist in a vacuum; it exists in a web of economic relationships. Salkeld is working in the tradition of constructivist art founded by Kandinsky, but his work is classified and often presented in the same context of Disney animation. Much of language-based conceptual art may be better preserved in libraries but in reality often archived in art museums. Why?

At least one thing is clear: after Dada it is almost meaningless to try to define what art is. An exhibition of works from the Saatchi collection entitled *Sensation* has been going through major cities of Great Britain and the U.S. since 1998. At this exhibition, which includes such objects as a fake cow's head with maggots (Damien Hirst, 1990) and a mass of frozen blood in the shape of the artist's head (Marc Quinn, 1991), visitors are handed a CD player that incessantly repeats the question 'But is this art?' in the familiar voice of David Bowie. Despite the notoriety the exhibition gained through a legal fight with New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani who condemned it as anti-Catholic and threatened to withdraw the city's funding from the museum, this exhibition of Charles Saatchi's collection is not so bad. Like many other collective exhibition this is a mixed bag of good and bad, on the whole, good. The question, "But is this art?", however, is old. And almost meaningless. Once a movement like Dada, which declared itself anti-art, is enshrined in the official history of art, then it logically follows that anything can be art. As a consequence, the working definition of art today after almost a century since the first wave of Dada is that everything is art that is created by an artist. And in most cases an artist is someone who has been associated with institutions supporting art such as art schools, galleries, museums, and so on. Therefore it is the self-perpetuating machine of art industry that defines what art is. Most adult visitors to modern art museums understand this, and so to them David Bowie's repeated question sounds hollow.

The more interesting question concerning art, therefore, is not what art is but what different types of art one finds in the world. This sort of inquiry should clarify for instance the difference between animation and conceptual art. Art is a com-

modity like everything else in the world. Since it is not an indispensable item for survival like water, food, clothing, and housing, its value must be outside the realm of the essential. In affluent capitalist societies there exists a huge amount of excess capital invested in paper money like stocks, bonds and increasingly so-called derivatives such as futures and option contracts. Some of the excess capital not invested in such financial instruments goes to seek other vessels, such as collectibles. Collectibles are traded on the floors of auction houses. In 1999 for instance the party dress worn by Marilyn Monroe at JFK's birthday party was sold at Christie's in New York for 1.26 million dollars. Paintings sold at such auction houses are bought partly due to their value as an ornament adorning the walls of rich people's houses but mainly due to their value as collectibles, that is, as value holding vessels. A famous Van Gogh painting is sold for easily over a million dollars, not because of its artistic value but because it is famous and rare, exactly the same reason why Marilyn Monroe's dress can fetch a similar price. A skilled counterfeiter could produce an equally wonderful painting but fakes are almost worthless because they are not unique, i.e. they go against the very pricing mechanism of the collectibles' market that works to drive up prices.

There exist two types of art: one that is tradable as a collectible (or has the potential of being traded on the collectible market), and one that is not. Most of what is known as conceptual art belongs to the first category. And most animated films are not and cannot even hope to be collectibles. The physical object of film footage is only a record of an animated work. What constitutes a work of animation is the projected images on the screen viewed by an audience, which makes a sharp contrast to the case of paintings in which the physical object of the collected item is in itself an work of art. Film footage itself is too unattractive an object to be a cherished collectible. It does not even come with a fancy container like the covers of LPs with graphic designs. For these reasons, apart from film libraries animated shorts are collected either by film libraries or by animation fans for whom financial returns are not primary concerns. However, physical objects associated with the production of animation can be traded as collectibles for a profit. For instance cel drawings of old Disney animations can be worth a great deal on today's market, although nowhere near as much as a Picasso or a Van Gogh. And for some of the better known animators like Yuri Norstein one of the few ways to finance their work is to auction drawings to collectors as future memorabilia. Understandably, animators do not relish this method of funding their work but it is often the only

effective way in the absence of patronage such as public funding. Norstein is in fact one of the lucky ones. Most animators are not so famous and cannot generate much interests among collectors. For a collectible to be valued highly it must be both well known (e.g. Disney), creating a great demand and rare (i.e. short supply). The kind of animated films that I discuss here have a very small following, and the same will continue to be the case in the future, which simply means they cannot hope to generate significant revenue on the collectible market.

How about conceptual art? Interestingly enough, there exists a large body of works that claim to oppose the very system and institutions associated with art, the galleries, museums, and so on. Or at least there used to be many artists creating such works in the 60s and 70s. We rarely hear about them any more these days. In his carefully documented survey entitled *Conceptual Art* (1998) Tony Godfrey quotes the well known conceptual artist Victor Burgin's criticism of the younger generation of conceptual artists such as Rachel Whitehead and Anya Gallaccio:

The original conceptual art is a failed avant-garde. Historians will not be surprised to find, amongst the ruins of its Utopian program, the desire to resist commodification and assimilation to a history of styles. The "new" conceptualism is the mirror image of the old — nothing but commodity, nothing but style. We once again have occasion to observe, "what history plays the first time around as tragedy, it repeats as farce." (Burgin wrote this in 1988) (*Conceptual Art*, p.386)

As Godfrey observes this is a sweeping condemnation. Victor Burgin may actually have a point. His generation of conceptual artists might have been indeed heroic and sincere in their battles with capitalism and therefore their defeat might have been nothing less than a tragedy. But there is another possibility. Here is what the critic Ursula Meyer said a few decades ago about Marcel Duchamp, the father of conceptual art:

Duchamp rebelled against the pervasive object cultus, typical of the commerce culture. After the initial shock wore off, the bourgeoisie "loved" Duchamp's Anti-Art, bought and collected it like other objet d'art, much to Duchamp's dismay and annoyance. In 1920 he surprisingly announced that he had changed from "anti-artist" to "engineer" (the shift coincides with Duchamp's adoption of the pseudonym Rose Selavy.) (*Idea Art*, p.118)

Indeed the name Marcel Duchamp is nowhere to be found in the credits of his animated film, *Anemic Cinema* (1926). Rose Selavy is the only name that appears. It seems clear from this that the father of conceptual art had deserted the world of collectibles and become an animator, a creator/ engineer of non-collectible art. Meyer's claim of anti-art objects fetching high prices on collectibles' markets is corroborated by the following contemporary account by Hans Richter, Duchamp's friend and collaborator.

This nucleus attracted a small group of artists and non-artists, among them the immensely rich collector Walter Arensberg, one of the most generous patrons of art the U.S.A. has ever seen. Neither the notoriety of anti-art nor the blasphemy of non-art deterred him in the least from buying the works of art which these slogans concealed. Nor did he merely buy; he worked like a true Dadaist on the preparation of Dada exhibitions. (*Dada, Art, and Anti-Art*, p.98)

So the great tragic battle against capitalism was fought and lost long before Burgin's time. Was he being disingenuous or simply naive in the attack he made in 1988? Whichever the case the fine distinction he insists on between his generation and the younger generation will fall on the deaf ears of future generations of visitors to art museums and galleries. Burgin's complaint is ultimately about his frustration with the economic success of younger conceptual artists. But who cares how much money artists make if their works are good? Had Beethoven lived a happy and prosperous life, would that diminish the greatness of his late string quartets? Absolutely not. Despite all the romantic mythologizing of his life, value judgements on his works ultimately do not depend on his biography or how much money he made. The same should apply to the works of conceptual artists.

Art is a commodity like anything else in the capitalist world. Any attempt at negating this fact immediately runs into self contradiction. Examples from the former communist countries are instructive in this context. Those countries lacked markets for goods and services except for clandestine ones. Tony Godfrey again makes an interesting remark about conceptual artists in former Communist Eastern Bloc:

Perhaps the artists of Eastern Europe were disillusioned by the 'failure' of Conceptual art than those in the West. "In the beginning Conceptual Art was considered to be against the corruption of consciousness and the bourgeois

ethic of the artist..” wrote the Yugoslavs Zoran Popovic and Jasna Tijadovic, “that Conceptual Art was just a perpetuation of the Western Bourgeois tradition has been felt deeply by certain Yugoslave artists. The OHO group had begun in 1966 to make Fluxus works, moved onto Land art...but gave it all up in 1977. Another group, <EKOD, having helped to translate and publish texts by Burgin, Kosuch, and Art & Language, were apparently so horrified to find that Western Conceptual works were selling for around \$10,000 each that they too gave up. (*Conceptual Art*, p.275)

Godfrey goes on to divulge the market values of some works of conceptual art: “Works by hardline Conceptualists made reasonable prices at auction too: one by Kosuth selling for \$75,000 in 1989 and one by Buren for \$23,000 in 1991.” (*Conceptual Art*, p.394) These numbers are somewhat old; for the latest quotes one only need to go to www.artnet.com.

The mention of East European artists in the context of this study is not coincidental, because those countries as well as the former Soviet Union have produced some of the most amazing talents in the field of art animation (as opposed to animated cartoons for children.) Apparently the lack of a bourgeois market for art objects worked as an incentive for visual artists to follow their instincts and move onto “art in motion” as opposed to “art in stasis” just as early modernist painters would have liked to but for financial and other reasons did not. In the former communist countries the salaries were fixed. Working at the pace of one second of film per day (six minutes per year) did not signify an economic disincentive because every one was getting paid more or less the same wage. In this sense, the fact that there exists a devoted animator like Salkeld in a capitalist country like Great Britain is in itself something to be celebrated, because he does what he does solely for the art and his society somehow finds the money to finance his work.

Animation is a form of cinema. Therefore the only way to generate revenues to sustain itself unless it is publicly funded as in the case of Great Britain, Canada, Communist countries etc., is by charging admission fees for screenings. During the early years of cinema animated shorts were a perfectly viable format because other films shown together were also short be they documentaries, slap stick comedies, or even personal film travelogues of the movie theater owners. But as cinema developed audiences started to demand one and a half hours or longer of uninterrupted fun. Under these circumstances art animation has become simply

unviable economically. And it is precisely for this reason why today animators like Jan Svankmajer and Brothers Quay have achieved some name recognition among a small number of cinema buffs outside of animation proper: they have made feature length films using animation techniques that can be shown in regular theaters as fictional drama. Yuri Norstein is currently working to create a forty or so minute long adaptation of Gogol's *Overcoat*. At the current pace he does not know if he can finish it during his life time. Sadly it will probably not gain a wide audience simply because it is not long enough to be shown as a feature film. Unfortunately most visitors to movie theaters demand to be entertained for over one hundred minutes no matter how bad.

What next?

After a brief experimentation with the medium of film Leger went back to painting. There were two reasons for this. First was his desire to work with colors, and the second was the money-losing nature of experimental film making. If Leger was active today at the end of the twentieth century, which area of art would he be interested in? A hypothetical question like this is always difficult to answer but virtual reality (VR), i.e. 3D animation in a 3D space, would definitely be one area an experimental artist like him would have a serious look at. Although prohibitively expensive, today's workstations are powerful enough to handle 3D animation of abstract geometric shapes in vivid colors enveloping a viewer. This is undoubtedly the cutting edge in which most serious and adventurous visual artists would love to be working, if only they could solve the obvious financial problems not dissimilar to those Leger faced when he made *Ballet Mecanique*. Abstract 3D animation on a 2D surface such as Salkeld's *Heavy Stock* does not seem to be generating revenues, let alone abstract 3D animation in a 3D space. The Opera City, the performing arts center in Hatsudai, Tokyo, houses a multimedia museum called ICC. There a visitor can experience abstract 3D animation in a 3D space. This is achieved by the synthesis of images projected on three (not the real total 3D which requires six) planes viewed through a head-mounted device. Only a few people are allowed at one time in the same room. Usually one has to stand in a line to be let in. This is hardly a money making operation especially considering the enormous overheads. Only a major cooperations such as, in this case, Japan's telecom giant

NTT can support such ventures as part of their PR activities. And such cooperations are usually very conservative: they would definitely not give an obscure but talented artist total liberty with regard to the use of their expensive workstations.

However, virtual reality technology has many commercial applications. In the U.S. there are many theme parks with rides that feature it as pure entertainment. These can be thought of as 3D movies, although not of a plot-oriented but an action-oriented kind. The riders of these rides become heroes in an action movie; the thrill they get is similar to that of a roller coaster ride. Because such theme parks have to be big to attract enough visitors to cover the heavy initial investments, they represent an area of business that only the very largest multinationals can successfully operate.

Carl Eugene Loeffler is a video/ conceptual artist turned VR entrepreneur. His earlier video art which was inspired by the Internet has been archived in major museums' permanent collections. He was once director of the media organization "Art Com" and the organizer of the Japanese video programs "Waveform" and "In Regard of Nature"; he also served as the project director of Telecommunications and Virtual Reality at the Studio for Creative Inquiry at Carnegie Mellon University, but later left the academia to head a venture company called Simation. He often travels to Japan on business to work with media research institutes and private corporations, best described as multi-media multi-nationals, like Sony. He is one of those rare artists with "avant-garde" sensibilities as well as credentials and yet who understand the business world. On March 17, 1999 he gave a talk at the Nagoya City University of the Arts in which he urged the young art students among the audience to join the cutting edge of VR and work for the market instead of seeking the patronage of galleries and museums.

Much of what is known as conceptual art has mocked the system of patronage and denounced the capitalist markets (patronage of anonymous masses). As we have seen, in most cases their endeavors ended up in failure. Victor Burgin made his name as a conceptual artist and thus secured his place in the annals of art history, and despite all the negative things he said about the art world it was precisely his place in art history, i.e. his fame, that transformed his anti-art to an economically viable collectible on the art market. As he noticed with some measure of contempt, the younger generation of artists are much more clever. For instance, the young British artists in Charles Saatchi's collection (some of whose works were shown at the aforementioned *Sensation* exhibition) know very well how to promote their work

on the art market much like the Bronx bred street smart Klara Sax (note her motive behind changing the name to Sax from Sachs). In their eyes, Victor Burgin would probably represent a naivete that had held onto the vacuous youthful innocence too long into adulthood.

There is, however, something unhealthy about the quarrel between these conceptual artists. Their political posturing against the art world and against each other only annoys many outsiders like myself as being petty and self-serving especially when their works are uninteresting (and they are indeed often uninteresting if not outright boring.) In contrast to this sorry state of affairs in today's "avant-garde" art world, Carl Loeffler's position is refreshing. And I consider his appeal to the market the only alternative to the avant-garde cul-de-sac unless one chooses the difficult path that Fernand Leger and Michael Salkeld took. If it strikes us as dangerously close to a sell-out, so be it. Loeffler's position is at least honest.

This important issue of the art market vs. the Market (the market for the rest of us anonymous masses) is nothing new. Fernand Leger pointed it out almost a century ago. Here is what he wrote about the then novel profession of window dressing:

...the art of window-dressing which in the last few years has assumed so great an importance. ... This man, this artisan, had to show in his window seventeen waistcoats, as many cufflinks and neckties. Watch in hand, he spent about 11 minutes on each. ... With the care of a watchmaker, of a jewel setter, he organized his show, his face tense, his eyes hard, as though his whole future life depended upon this. When I think of the negligence, the looseness in the work of certain artists — renowned painters whose pictures bring high prices — we should admire profoundly that brave artisan working so hard and so conscientiously. His work to him is worth so much more than the other, work which must disappear and which every few days he must renew with the same care and study. (*Cubist Cinema*, p.161)

Here Leger is talking about the care and artistry involved in works of art that are not traded as collectibles. The looseness and negligence he mentions about paintings traded on the art market derive from the very nature of the market where players are relatively few and definitely not penny pinchers. On the other hand the Market for the rest of us is incomparably more severe. There the players are anonymous and innumerable. To satisfy them artists/ artisans must be meticulous about every

Animation, Conceptual Art, and Don DeLillo's *Underworld*: collectibles and non-collectibles in art detail. Modernists have taken elitist pleasure in mocking them. Now at the beginning of a new millennium where modernism is well over a century old, we may need an entirely different approach at both ends of artistic production.

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