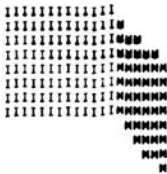


Feedback

Expertise, LACMA, and the Think Tank

The most interesting and creative art of our time is *not* open to the generally educated; it demands special effort; it speaks a specialized language.

—Susan Sontag, “One Culture and the New Sensibility”



Edward Kienholz, the Los Angeles–based artist famous for his found-object assemblages, used to drive a truck with the legend “ED KIENHOLZ—EXPERT” painted on the door. Kienholz worked as a handyman to pay the bills, suggesting something of the resourcefulness and entrepreneurial spirit that made the Ferus Gallery, which he opened in 1957 with Walter Hopps, the hub of the emerg-

ing LA avant-garde. As a form of self-promotion, Kienholz’s claim to be an “expert” is both a joke and a statement of fact. It pokes fun at the notional value of an expertise that can stand as a proclamation of superior knowledge or skill without anywhere announcing the area of specialism to which it refers. The idea of a generic expert makes little sense, yet it does speak to the expanded domain of the post-medium artist, where expertise in art as such is not bound to specific materials, skills, traditions, or content. The Duchampian spirit animating much of the LA scene (Hopps would go on to curate the influential, and first, museum retrospective of Duchamp’s work at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1963) is there on Kienholz’s truck door: expertise is what the expert says it is.

The idea of the expert, though, has a broader valence in 1950s US culture. The defense of science that developed in the early postwar period by Vannevar Bush and others was intended to shape a public perception of specialized expertise as a necessary and desirable condition for the full realization of modernity's democratic promise. The emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration, while in a sense at odds with the increasingly focused research undertaken by scientists and engineers, answered the charge that narrow specialization led to the creation of a cloistered scientific priesthood. If the cultivation of elite expertise was an affront to a more Deweyan notion of scientific democracy, collaboration among experts allowed for a different, albeit more exclusive, sense of science as a collective endeavor in the service of the people. With scientific, technological and social scientific expertise increasingly presented as enablers of social efficiency and prosperity, meritocratic Cold War educational and scientific institutions could remain on the side of democracy, charged with recognizing and nurturing the capacities of any citizen willing to learn.¹

It is here, perhaps, in the democratizing of creativity as the source code for the expert, that the military-industrial articulation of scientific and technological innovation as a creative project undertaken by specialists drawn from a common pool converges with the avant-garde's expanded field of artistic engagement. The rejection of the production of objects, along with the singularity of the artist as individual genius, and the emphasis instead on collective, processual investigations across multiple sites and platforms, made the practice of art an embodied realization of democratic possibility (along Deweyan lines) that broke down barriers between work and audience, participation and spectatorship. At the same time, the capacity to understand such processes and engagements as art required a particular stance toward the work that implied a kind of expertise of the sort Kienholz mobilized in his own self-promotion. In other words, the expanded field of the neo-avant-garde did not so much remove the notion of expert knowledge and skill from art as it repositioned such a notion. The definition of what constitutes art underwent a radical restructuring, yet the notion of art as the domain of a distinctive set of specialists remained, even as the terms of what that specialism amounted to changed. Although there may have been little common ground between research scientists and engineers and artists in terms of background, working practices, and operating assumptions, what art and technology collaboration advocates like Billy Klüver recognized was that the general terms upon which postwar American society was premised—terms like creativity, expertise, and innovation—served, in a broad sense, to describe what scientists, engineers and artists were all about.

It is for this reason, we think, that there is little mention by Klüver, Kepes, and others of the political ramifications of their efforts to align technology and art beyond a general, all-purpose utopianism. Any resistance or suspicion among artists or engineers toward the other camp is massaged away through an appeal to the virtues of collaboration and a stress on finding common ground. There appears to be no forum at projects like E.A.T. within which the challenges of working alongside prominent military-industrial institutions might be addressed beyond formal or technical difficulties. In many ways, the shared technocratic embrace of a generalized notion of expertise made it possible for scientists, engineers, and artists alike to perceive themselves and their work within a context that erased the boundaries between the professionalized sites of laboratory and studio while protecting the distinctiveness and importance of what they thought they were doing. In short, the cultural capital enjoyed by American scientists, engineers, and artists during the 1950s and early 1960s allowed each group to benefit in relatively uncomplicated ways through their association with other fellow experts. Scientists and engineers could indeed be said to be creative since artists sought them out; artists could imagine their work as investigative and experimental by virtue of their proximity to the apparatus and personnel of science.

Despite this broadly welcoming context of mutual professional respect, however, and regardless of the efforts of organizers to downplay clumsy or unsuccessful collaborations, it was often in the friction that the real heat was generated in 1960s art and technology projects: when artists and their hosts and collaborators did not get on; when planned collaborations fizzled out or collapsed; when the results of collaborations were dismissed or challenged. This is most obviously the case with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's Art and Technology Project, which shared something with both CAVS and E.A.T. in terms of vision and ambition but which, especially in its culminating exhibition, came to mark the moment when the art-and-technology vanguard became, almost overnight, the vilified embodiment of complicity with the American military-industrial state. The project was also, as we shall see, responsible for pushing the art-and-technology brief beyond an investigation of materials and devices and into, intriguingly, the area of corporate thinking itself.

The Center of a New Civilization

Maurice Tuchman, a twenty-seven-year-old research fellow at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, became the first curator of twentieth-century art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in 1964, a year before the institution moved to its site on Wilshire Boulevard. The three-building museum,

constructed at a cost of \$11.5 million, is suggestive of the growing cultural confidence of a city that had experienced nearly two decades of massive population growth and urban development since World War II. Despite the work of Kienholz, Hopps, and others during the 1950s, though, LA art had remained subordinate to the power of the New York art world. Part of Tuchman's mission was to put LA art on the map—the city was set to become, the curator told *Life* magazine, “the center of a new civilization” (Wernick 1966, 116)—and secure LACMA's place as the center of the LA art world. To do this, in 1966 he conceived of a program that explicitly sought to bind the museum into Southern California's booming Cold War technology sector. By hooking up the museum to the financial mainline, Tuchman's proposed Art and Technology Program (A&T) would secure the position of art as an integral part of the Southern California success story.

Tuchman's strategy was to stress the minimal cost involved to sponsors, compared to their contributions to other organizations, and to highlight the benefit to business from “proximity to thriving cultural resources in attracting talented personnel” (Tuchman 1971, 9), as well as the bonus for employees from exposure to creative people. All artworks produced as part of the program would be given to the corporations involved. With the help of Missy Chandler, the wife of the *Los Angeles Times* publisher who had read about the project in a newspaper feature, Tuchman recruited forty corporations, some merely as financial contributors, others hosting artists in factories, labs, and offices. Many of the participating corporations were aerospace companies (Lockheed, Pan American, Jet Propulsion Laboratory), major players in computing (Hewlett-Packard, IBM), entertainment (Universal, 20th Century Fox), and electronics (Ampex, Philco-Ford), as well as construction (Kaiser Steel, American Cement) and think tanks like RAND and Herman Kahn's Hudson Institute—the organizations that built and sustained the Cold War United States.²

Unlike E.A.T., which encouraged artists to apply to the organization, Tuchman approached artists directly, resulting in a wide spectrum of activities ranging from unproductive exploratory meetings and stalled plans through to the fourteen completed projects that ended up in the exhibit that concluded the program in 1971. Seventy-six participating artists were listed in the *Report on the Art and Technology Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art 1967–1971*, the extensive document published to accompany the LACMA show that attempted to record exhaustively the history of the program from its inception (Tuchman 1971). Most of the artists were well-known; more than half were based in New York; fifteen were European (or working in Europe); eighteen were local LA artists. All of the artists were men. The fourteen who exhibited

in 1971 were largely high-profile stars, including R. B. Kitaj, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Serra, and Andy Warhol. Only twenty-eight out of the seventy-six were placed in residencies; those who did not make it into the show either had not finished in time, ran out of money, never planned to produce work to exhibit, or had fallen out with their sponsor.

The reception of the LACMA A&T show was not helped by the fact that it ignored female artists, favored established New Yorkers over LA artists (only Frederick Eversley and Newton Harrison, among the exhibited artists, were local, though Tuchman had tried to recruit more), and produced viable work from only a small fraction of the collaborations A&T had organized. The *Los Angeles Free Press* published a challenge to LACMA's white male bias by the recently founded Los Angeles Council of Women Artists (LACWA), who also produced a seven-page report on LACMA (Fallon 2014, 17). Questions of representation, however, were only part of a broader problem faced by A&T and other art and technology initiatives by the end of the 1960s as US public opinion shifted sharply away from the technocratic model of corporate liberalism. Like E.A.T., Tuchman saw international expositions as obvious sites for the presentation of art-and-technology collaboration, and eight A&T artists were shown at the American pavilion at Expo '70 in Osaka. The LA press was happy to promote the "democratic ideals of co-operation and interaction between various levels of the society" (quoted in Goodyear 2008, 170) that A&T displayed at Osaka, but Cold War public relations of this kind were increasingly unfashionable and suspect.³

In a context of rapidly changing fortunes for art-and-technology projects, the role of documentation became an important way for organizers to explain and secure the reputation of their activities. The in-house and public-facing stream of bulletins issued by E.A.T. created a sense of momentum and coherence surrounding the aims of the organization, but it is the *Pavilion* book, more than the proceedings and reports, that gives Klüver the chance to demonstrate the depth and complexity of what E.A.T. was trying to accomplish (see Klüver, Martin, and Rose 1972). Similarly, it is the *Report on the Art and Technology Program*, rather than the exhibition, that most effectively captures the spirit of A&T. Tuchman's report is in many ways the most interesting outcome of the LACMA project, a document David Antin was already calling, in his 1971 review of the A&T show, a work of "conceptual art" (Antin 2011, 61). In order to give a full account of what Tuchman describes as "the emotional complexities and the sheer logistical difficulties" of the A&T Program (Tuchman 1971, 29), the report presents the business case, the contracts, the list of companies and their logos, the works completed and, more revealingly, the incomplete, the

impossible, the miscommunication, and the breakdown of relations among artists, engineers, and businesses. It details conversations, phone calls, negotiations, drawings, and diagrams produced in the course of interactions among museum staff, 76 artists, and over 225 corporation employees. Like the various E.A.T. bulletins and press releases or a Fluxus work on steroids, the A&T report positions the program of ongoing art and technology investigations itself as the project's core experimental practice. Tuchman is right to do this inasmuch as he was aware from the outset that the final exhibit would never properly represent the range of explorations that had been undertaken, though as a project supported by a major museum the necessity of a show of completed work was clear enough.

It is in the daily negotiations among participants, then, that the ramifications of collaborative or residential work are most properly tested. This is clearly the case in two of the A&T residencies that are distinctive, both among the A&T projects and more widely among the other art and technology ventures, in that they involved organizations explicitly concerned with Cold War intellectual and theoretical formations rather than corporations, businesses, or institutions engaged in the physical investigation or manipulation of materials. Nowhere is the discourse of expertise more vividly revealed than in the placement of John Chamberlain at the RAND Corporation and James Lee Byars at the Hudson Institute.

Most of the placements arranged for A&T artists had a clear practical dimension and involved consultation with technicians and engineers over the feasibility, cost, management, and delivery of fabricated structures. At RAND and the Hudson Institute, by contrast, the business of the organization was the generation of ideas. As such, A&T introduced a new dimension to the notion of the artist placement, since there was no obvious material assistance that the corporation could supply. The inclusion of think tanks in the category of organizations concerned with technology also recognized the extent to which mathematics, statistical and policy analysis, and planning had become integrated into the industrial system. While there had been think tanks in the US since the Progressive Era, RAND and Hudson represented the new postwar generation of what are often called universities without students: institutions charged with developing strategy and innovative policy programs outside of, but often paid for by, government.

The Think Tank and the Memo

The first national organizations that would, by the 1960s, become known as think tanks, emerged in the early twentieth century, during the Progressive Era's growing confidence in the application of social scientific expertise to solve social

problems and inform government decision-making. Demand for policy research and analysis intensified during the 1930s (including President Roosevelt's "brain trust" of experts), and by World War II the use of nonprofit advisory organizations to provide expertise to government and the military expanded. Among the first and best known of the post-World War II think tanks was the RAND Corporation, which began as a Douglas Aircraft subsidiary that provided research to the United States Air Force. After the war, RAND became an independent nonprofit think tank based in Santa Monica, California, almost entirely dependent on government contracts. With government intervention in the management of a widening array of social and economic affairs, the think tank became a significant means of developing and planning policy. As James Allen Smith observes, RAND "became the prototype for a method of organizing and financing research, development, and technical evaluation that would be done at the behest of governmental agencies, but carried out by privately run nonprofit research centers" (1991, 116). During the 1950s, RAND was deeply engaged in nuclear strategy and the development of systems analysis, producing its most notorious alumnus in Herman Kahn, whose scenario planning for nuclear conflict provoked disquiet when he published *On Thermonuclear War* in 1960, a book famously described by *Scientific American* as a "moral tract of mass murder: how to plan it, how to commit it, how to get away with it, how to justify it" (quoted in Rich 2004, 45). Because RAND was less than happy with Kahn's growing public profile, he left the organization to form the Hudson Institute in 1961, where again the Department of Defense was his biggest customer.⁴

The rising status of the policy analyst benefited from the general post-war high regard with which science was held, and researchers like those at RAND presented themselves, and were presented in the mainstream media, as experimental scientists of a sort, able to invent and engineer new social and organizational forms (see Smith 1991, 14). The wide range of analytical tools developed at RAND, James Smith argues, were a source "of extraordinary confidence in policy making," and the expert during the 1960s "gained new heights of prestige and political influence" (121).⁵ At the same time, the suspicion of ideology prevalent during the early 1950s and early 1960s presupposed an intellectual environment that focused on the technical assessment of means rather than challenging the broader structures within which solutions to problems might be addressed. In other words, the elevation of the expert was framed within an understanding of the role of expertise delimited within the terms of a consensus that saw abstract ideas as politically dangerous.

The New York-based artist John Chamberlain was contacted by LACMA in April 1969, and curator Jane Livingston met him in New York. The possibility

of a film project with Ampex, RCA, or CBS was discussed, and Chamberlain visited Ampex in Los Angeles in May, though nothing came of it. After another project, involving packaged odors, failed to connect with corporate sponsors, Chamberlain was offered the option of a placement with a division of Norris Industries, a manufacturer of porcelain bathroom fixtures, or the RAND Corporation. Chamberlain chose RAND.

Larry Bell had already been placed at RAND earlier in the year by A&T, but despite his initial sense of the “romance” of an organization engaged in all sorts of top secret work, nothing happened and Bell was out of RAND by July. In August, Chamberlain was given an office and some secretarial help, and left to navigate the organization. Chamberlain explained to A&T in September, around three weeks into his residency, that the going had been tough; he “couldn’t make any headway at the beginning” and the RAND people had thus far been unresponsive (Tuchman 1971, 71). On the face of it, RAND ought to have been receptive enough: the previous year, the corporation’s assistant to the president had written A&T that “RAND has something special to offer the creative artist: an intellectual atmosphere and the stimulation of being amid creative individuals working in many disciplines” (71). This promise of interdisciplinary creativity was what Chamberlain hoped to find, and what he had come to expect given RAND’s reputation. “I’m not really against the concept of RAND,” he explained, “its uniqueness since 1946, through ’56, even until 1960” (71). Since those early days, though, the corporation, in Chamberlain’s assessment, had become “somewhat stodgy and constricting” and instead of intellectual brilliance he found mostly “sort of dumb fifth grade attitudes about everything” (74).

It is telling that the sense of disappointed belatedness in Chamberlain’s remarks, that he had somehow missed the golden age of RAND, is explained by an awareness that there had been something unique about the corporation until 1960—around the time Herman Kahn left to found the Hudson Institute. Chamberlain does not mention Kahn but it is Kahn and his freewheeling intellectual audacity that had come to define RAND during the 1950s. It was also in response to the artist that A&T had placed at the Hudson Institute, James Lee Byars, that Chamberlain came up with the notion of sending RAND employees memos asking for “answers.” Byars had begun his involvement with the Hudson Institute in May 1969 and continued to work there through mid-July, returning periodically after that until the end of the year.

What Byars was mainly interested in was “questions”: the key aspect of his four-pronged investigation was to gather the “one hundred most in-

teresting questions in America at this time” (Tuchman 1971, 58), which he planned to glean by telephoning influential people from what he called the World Question Center. The other three points he intended to pursue suggest a somewhat awestruck Byars: “the exultation of being in the proximity of extraordinary people,” “the next step after $E = MC^2$,” and “one thousand superlatives about the Hudson Institute” (58). Byars communicated with Hudson staff mainly through internal memos and questionnaires, the first being a request from Byars for “one hundred superlatives on Herman Kahn.” Answering his own question, Byars’s top superlative was: “I-fell-in-love-with-Herman-Kahn-because-I-knew-in-advance-that-he-could-speak-four-hundred-words-a-minute” (60).

Like Chamberlain, Byars knew in advance that Kahn was extraordinary—the myth of the genius “defense intellectual” framed his expectations. Unlike Chamberlain, though, Byars got to play in Kahn’s sandpit, and Byars was clearly electric with excitement in the presence of greatness while Chamberlain was deflated because he believed he had missed the boat. Chamberlain’s memo requesting “answers” at RAND had to acknowledge a prior question he did not get to ask, and there is a certain testiness to the memo that exceeds the feigned bureaucratic mode Chamberlain adopts:

TO: Everyone at RAND

FROM: John Chamberlain, Artist in Residence

SUBJECT: ANSWERS

I’m searching for ANSWERS. Not questions!

If you have any, will you please fill in below
and send them to me in Room 1138.

THANKS

CHAMBERLAIN [written in black ink]

(Chamberlain 1969)⁶

Whether the impatient tone here (the emphatic “ANSWERS,” and the curt, exclamatory dismissal of questions) is a measure of Chamberlain’s frustration with RAND or an attempt to engage with (and outflank) Byars is unclear. The A&T report explained that the two artists did not coordinate their projects, even though Chamberlain “felt in the beginning that the answers might correspond to Byars’ questions, and perhaps even be used in conjunction with them as an art work” (Tuchman 1971, 74). What the report did concede, though, is that, despite Byars’s awestruck pronouncements about Kahn and the Hudson Institute, things did not go smoothly for either think tank-based artist: “Both were to some degree unsuccessful in drawing enough interesting material from their ‘subjects’ to constitute a satisfactory artistic product,” and had to rely on “their own inventions” to complete their respective projects (74).

The kind of projects Byars and Chamberlain sought to initiate at the think tanks and the difficulties they faced reveal a fascination with the notion of an intellectual hothouse environment, and also with the modes of communication they took to be the common practice within them. The Hudson Institute and RAND represent at once a deep establishment commitment to the protocols and hierarchies of the bureaucratic state and a new model of creative inquiry plugged into the mechanisms of policy-making. The think tank, at least as it is reflected in Byars and Chamberlain through their respective exulted and dejected responses to their placement within one, is where ideas become actions, where creativity has leverage, and where the exceptional and visionary are cultivated. According to this conception, which the popular media nurtured throughout the 1950s and which Kahn’s celebrity status seemed to confirm, RAND and the Hudson Institute represented the triumphant fusion of the studio, the laboratory, and the country club: they were creative, experimental, and exclusive, full of “extraordinary people,” as Byars imagined them, making the future happen. The problem, as both artists found, was that the extraordinary people were less than impressed by the presence of the artists.

The think tank is among the institutions to develop out of, and to crucially shape, the emergent information society of the postwar period. John Guillory defines information “as any given (datum) of our cognitive experience that can be materially encoded for the purpose of transmission or storage” (2004, 110). Guillory argues that information is more than fact but less than knowledge; fact becomes information, he suggests, “when it is, so to speak, value-added” (110)—when the fact comes to be known in a certain context. Information is less than knowledge because it has not yet been organized into a structure of intelligibility. What is distinctive about information, then, is that its value lies in transmission: “Information demands to be transmitted because

it has a shelf life, a momentary value” that, if missed, requires that the information “be stored to await its next opportunity” (111). The storage of information is a key aspect of what Michel de Certeau (1984, 131–153) calls the “scriptural economy,” since the management of written documents is at the heart of modern bureaucracy and its rules for the administration of the files containing the drafts, letters, memos, and reports that comprise the record of the business of the office (see Weber 1978, 957–958).

Guillory’s notion of information as fact valued in transmission provides a strong indication of the function of the think tank, where ideas and theories are produced and circulated out of a perceived need to answer specific questions. Unlike scholarly or scientific research, think tanks like RAND are not tasked with the disinterested production of knowledge; they are precisely concerned with the delivery of information or data that can be applied to address particular issues. For Guillory, the quintessential information genre is the memorandum, a document that is “both *ephemeral* and *permanent*” (2004, 113, original emphasis): the memo “might have an audience of one, or none; it might be read once, or never. But however vanishingly ephemeral its interest, it must nonetheless be preserved, that is, *filed*” (113, original emphasis).⁷ The memo “gives directions, makes recommendations, but, above all, it is a means of transmitting information within the large bureaucratic structures organizing virtually all work in modernity” (112). Memos are often regulated according to the dictates of standardized forms, and as such their content may be marked by the expectations and practices required by an organization. The memo, in this sense, represents a management of expression according to the shape imposed by the rules and procedures of a business. The circulation of memos is commonly restricted to communications within an organization, suggesting that they constitute an ongoing transcription of its communicational culture—what JoAnne Yates calls “organizational memory” (Yates 1990).

For Guillory, the memo, as a genre of writing that emerges during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, along with the emergence of modern large-scale business organizations, coincides with the demise of the rhetorical tradition associated with oral communication, eloquence, and persuasion. In contrast, the memo reduces scope for persuasion—due to the demands of what Guillory calls an “economy of attention” (2004, 125)—“in favor of permitting a certain instruction to speak for itself” (120). This does not necessarily mean that there is not desire to persuade, only that “persuasion is implicit . . . in simply transmitting information” (120). A memo, when it “*directs* others to act,” is received “*as information*, as the answer to the subaltern’s question, What should I do?” (121, original emphasis). Where action “is *recommended* to equals

or superiors and argument is supplied, the weight of the argument must be carried by information, and contestation occurs around the question of what course of action the information actually implies” (121, original emphasis). Informational writing is, then, an expression of control where individuals within large organizations with complex communicative networks are “dependent, whatever their rank, on the transmission of information possessed by others and where all functionaries are equally compelled, whenever they write, to submit their writing to certain generic constraints” (122). Chamberlain’s interest in the memo as a mode of information generation and dissemination shares something with aspects of Conceptual Art, namely a focus on constraint, procedure, and seriality. These same concerns are pursued exhaustively by Fluxus.

Chamberlain’s call for answers through the use of memos came after his initial failed attempts to engage RAND personnel. He suggested dissolving the corporation, cutting off the phones for one day, and taking photos of staff on the patios. Then he decided to screen his film *The Secret Life of Hernando Cortez*, a typically late 1960s art film featuring stalwarts from Warhol’s Factory and hallucinatory soft porn, in the cafeteria.⁸ *Cortez* was shown once a day for three days before the screenings were canceled due to complaints. This is the point at which Chamberlain dispatched his first memo.

Some responses were measured, if gnomic (“A cautious balance between cataclysmic optimism and discerning myopia”), others facetious (“ $2 + 2 = 4$ ”; “pi to the twenty-forth digit”), dismissive (“quit wasting RAND paper + time”) and downright hostile (“the answer is to terminate Chamberlain”). More than one respondent displayed expert math chops by scratching out a complex equation, while another stayed resolutely on message by reflecting on the ratio of actual to estimated costs of weapons systems and the speed of computer runs before and after “debugging.” One carefully wrote out a very long word (“pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis”) with a condescending parenthesis (“in any dictionary”), while another provided a short essay on the current “sex revolution.” Many betrayed confusion (“no comprende!”) and uncertainty about what question exactly they were being asked to answer, leading a number of respondents to provide an assessment of the *Cortez* film (“stop making movies—stick to sculpture”) or make suggestions about how RAND decor could be improved. One of the more lengthy replies provided a review of the film *and* requested more color and some pictures in the hall (as well as correcting the spelling of “thanxs” in red ink).

What Chamberlain expected to receive beyond this mixture of pointy-headed bureaucracy, literal-mindedness, philistinism, and snark is unclear, but he was dissatisfied enough with the responses of RAND staff to issue a clari-

fying (and somewhat admonitory) bulletin, sent on his behalf by his RAND contact Brownlee Haydon:

TO: Everyone at RAND
FROM: Brownlee Haydon
SUBJECT: JOHN CHAMBERLAIN'S MEMO (ATTACHED)

Before he left for the East, John Chamberlain gave me the attached memo for distribution.

Because of some of the responses to his earlier memo asking for "answers," I think everyone should understand:

1. John has nothing to do with the experimental redecoration of RAND's halls and offices (see Roger Levien).
2. John is a guest artist-in-residence, sponsored by and paid for by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
3. His question about answers was not intended to elicit reviews of or comments about his film.

In a further memo, with the subject heading "MORE ANSWERS," Chamberlain thanked the previous respondents and explained that he would now "like to be more explicit." Unfortunately, the explanation he provided of what he was after is far from clear: "I had hoped for a more specific poetic imagery to induce, or suggest, an alternative to thinking if or when asked to pair with it, a question or statement. The altruistic answer is nice, but less interesting . . . the challenging being from without rather than within." One respondent to this memo underlined the word "explicit" and wrote in the margin "Aw, come on!" Another provided a dictionary definition of the word ("characterized by full clear expression") and, in a typed note, instructed Chamberlain that "one of the functions of the artist is to *communicate*. I can't find one person who understood either your first communication or your second. We would be happy to share our spiritual experiences with you if we knew what you are trying to express. Could you please rephrase paragraph #2 (Ernest Hemingway you ain't!) so we can understand what the hell you are driving at—or do you

know yourself?” This is a fair criticism—it is hard to tell from Chamberlain’s explanation what he is after.

Despite his disappointment with the pedantic, and sometimes puerile, responses to his memos, a fair number of RAND staff did attempt to genuinely engage in Chamberlain’s exercise, even if they could not fathom the purpose. One response, for example, managed to provide a sharp sketch of the RAND experience from the inside:

RAND atmosphere = above average intellectual honesty + personal isolation in white cubicles = a bright bunch of non-communicative neurotics—
Now you come up with a question.

There is a combination of openness and guardedness here, as well as a willingness to identify the tension between collective labor and compartmentalization. This respondent understands the function of the memo as a mode of combat at one remove—employees screened off from one another but accustomed to receiving (and returning) hurled challenges. What Chamberlain’s RAND experiment begins to explore, whether deliberately or not, is the bureaucratic mode of communication as a manager, as well as the medium, of information exchange. The memo encourages, and is the condition for, a certain kind of terse exchange, but responses are of necessity delayed. This delay provides an opportunity for reflection but not for the effective correction of misunderstandings. As Chamberlain’s limited success in communicating clearly with RAND staff suggests, the memo as a form of communication is just as effective at blocking exchange as it is at enabling it. For Chamberlain, the memo was also presumably an unfamiliar mode of address, and no small part of the cause of his inability to explain what he wanted to do at RAND was down to a failure to communicate using the preferred professional form and idiom.

In an A&T questionnaire Chamberlain completed at the end of the project, he explained that the first person he met at RAND told him that the corporation made “no product except paper.” This, Chamberlain goes on, “proved to be incorrect as it took me four weeks to figure that their product was response or feedback.”⁹ Here, Chamberlain reveals a more sophisticated awareness of the memo culture than is first apparent in his awkward communications with RAND staff. It may have taken a few weeks to work out, but what Chamberlain’s memos kick into action is the RAND feedback machine. Processed through and resituated within Chamberlain’s art-world context, these irritable scraps collect a form of found poetry that stands as the scratchy transcript of the limits of art-and-technology interaction.

While he clearly was not much of a writer, Chamberlain had spent a year during the mid-1950s at Black Mountain College, where he worked mainly alongside poets, including Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, and Fielding Dawson, as well as painters like Joseph Fiore and the musician Stefan Wolpe (see Waldman 1971, 17). He was aware of the benefits of collaboration across disciplines, and the expectations he brought to RAND may well have been colored by his experience at Black Mountain, where exceptional talent was gathered and given free rein. Chamberlain's inability to generate purposeful dialog at RAND was, in his view, a measure of the staff's "constriction," though it is apparent from his memos that part of the problem lay in an opacity all his own. Accustomed to working among the most advanced artistic and literary practitioners in the country, Chamberlain seems unable to recognize his own mode of communication as itself a specialist discourse, and concludes that it is his hosts who are intellectually under par. The notion that RAND staff might have a working knowledge of contemporary art and aesthetics is as optimistic as the prospect that Chamberlain could follow the calculus he received among his "answers." The frustration with RAND employees, then, is due to Chamberlain's sense that, as a member of what Habermas (1987, 397) calls an "expert culture" (the upper echelons of the US art world), he ought to be conversant with and treated on a par with other expert cultures—in this case, RAND. That this patently was not the case not only challenges Chamberlain's personal sense of professional status and competence but also, more seriously, puts in question the operating assumptions of the interdisciplinary collaboration underpinning art-and-technology projects like LACMA's.

What Was the Question?

Someone who might have been able to follow Chamberlain's cryptic requests was Herman Kahn, whose own unruly oral presentations had to be hammered into coherence for publication by dutiful associates. By 1968 Kahn's performance style had turned the defense intellectual (a category of exotic specialist he came to embody) into a kind of star turn, as admired for his manner of delivery as for what he had to say about thermonuclear war. A *New York Times Sunday Magazine* feature from that year described Kahn as possessing "computerlike capacities" that, in public performance, enable him to "reach into his prodigious repertoire for a series of appropriate 'routines'—explanations, arguments, responses, dramatizations or anecdotes that he has developed in previous lectures and conversations" (quoted in Pickett 1992, 10). Here was the

kind of brain and charisma to match Charles Olson's or Buckminster Fuller's famously unruly and erudite lecture style. Chamberlain may have been right that RAND had lost its maverick spirit after 1960, but on the other side of the continent it was that spirit of which James Lee Byars was so enamored at Kahn's Hudson Institute.

At Hudson, Kahn was beginning to expand the range of think tank activity beyond defense concerns into the new field of future-oriented analysis, a realm of enquiry as abstract and unmanageable—and as reliant, in Kahn's mind, on speculation and outrageous vision—as nuclear deterrence theory. Khan hired on instinct and preferred insight and imagination over academic qualifications. He wanted to shred conventional wisdom and admitted that while his eclectic staff could be “impossible,” they were also “extremely interesting” (quoted in Pickett 1992, 7). Here, surely, was the germinal environment within which an artist might work—Byars's effusive early praise for Kahn certainly seemed to suggest as much. Nevertheless, as the A&T report explains, Byars experienced “a general attitude of hostility” to his presence from the institute's staff, who thought what he was doing was a waste of their, and his, time (Tuchman 1971, 60). After the first few weeks, there was little interaction between Byars and the staff, and he spent much of his time “wandering about in the halls, chatting to people at random” (60). Byars was able to spend around twenty hours in total with Kahn during his time at the Hudson Institute, though when asked by A&T curator Jane Livingston about the value of Byars's presence there, Kahn was circumspect in his appraisal. The World Question Center, for Khan, was “a totally undisciplined and uninformed project.” For someone well known for his interest in disruptive intelligence, Kahn was less sure about the purpose of hosting Byars: “Why are we bothering with Jim?” he wondered. “After all, I want the organization to run right. The presence of someone like Jim is theoretically subversive of that goal” (60). Livingston suggests that Kahn left the question of why it was worth bothering with Jim unanswered, though given Khan's propensity for amateur insight as a means to crack open received ideas it is surprising that the potential subversion Byars offered was not more fulsomely embraced. Byars himself seemed to sense the problem, which is that Kahn did not see art “as a category of enormous interest for himself or for the world—he tends to view it as a luxury” (60).

One of the A&T team, the assistant curator Hal Glicksman, was able to make a firsthand assessment of the Byars-Kahn interaction when he attended a policy seminar at Hudson in July. For Glicksman, though Kahn was responsive to Byars, there was an evident grinding of gears when Byars's mode of thinking met the analyst's response: “somehow when a person is that rational and

is asked a nonsensical question, the question and answer just don't jibe" (62). Asked by Byars what the most important question of the twentieth century might be, Kahn's response, according to Glicksman, was to break down the question until it became manageable: "Kahn says, 'Well, this question is on three levels. First of all there are cosmic questions like, How is the world created, does God exist and this sort of thing. We can dismiss those.' Then he goes on to outline the three most important questions of the current day. I forget what they were . . . Viet Nam and this and that" (62). The sense here is that Kahn handles the unruly nature of the initial question by bracketing off the imponderable, allowing him to reframe the issue as a policy matter. In other words, all questions lead back to the business of the Hudson Institute. It is not so much, perhaps, that the question and answer "don't jibe" but that Kahn appears less interested in addressing a question he can see no purpose in answering and practiced enough to convert an open enquiry back into terms relevant to himself and his business. As Hudson staffer Frank Armbruster explained to Byars, "Most of the world is concerned with problems which they think have imminent solutions" (62). Byars insisted that he was not interested in solutions as such and complained that "no one could get this through his head, including Herman Kahn" (62). The World Question Center would have failed, Byars conceded, if he had restricted himself to Hudson. To keep the project viable he had to step out of the tank.

The sense here is of Hudson as an echo chamber, where unpredictable and left-field ideas are encouraged only inasmuch as they feed the narrative of "thinking about the unthinkable." The point of Kahn's well-known phrase is not so much to articulate, in the faux Zen form popular among the counter-culture of the time, a paradox as it is to convert the unthinkable into thinkable terms. In this regard, despite the freewheeling style cultivated by Kahn, the instrumentalization of thought remains paramount: only that which can be made amenable to thinking about policy is worth thinking about. For Kahn, the organization will not run right if it concerns itself with questions without answers or problems without solutions. If there is anything "subversive" about Byars being at Hudson, it is in his desire to break the causal link between question and answer and to fixate on the question itself as the object of enquiry. Chamberlain, despite having no contact with Byars, clearly grasped what Byars was doing at Hudson and pursued the idea from the opposite direction. It is the orphaned term (for Chamberlain, the answer without a question; for Byars, the question without an answer) that spooks the think tankers, disrupting the problem-solving apparatus and resisting resolution. What is surprising is not that the RAND and Hudson employees saw this as a waste of time and resources,

but that Byars and Chamberlain thought it might go the other way. Both Byars and Chamberlain entered the think tanks anticipating high-intensity, high-status intellectual engagement, yet neither of them found it there. Their credibility and reputations as artists counted for little in the policy world, and their interactions with staff rarely moved beyond bemusement and condescension. Strangely, given the anti-Vietnam War movement and the growing radical critique of the military establishment after 1968, there is no sign from Byars or Chamberlain that RAND or the Hudson Institute might be politically toxic. The sabotaging of rationality that their orphaned questions and answers enacts would fit well into a subversive narrative about art infiltrating and undermining the logic of the military-industrial complex. Yet this is a claim neither artist seems interested in making. Neither is the fetishization of expertise that each of them appears to lean toward seriously interrogated or admitted.

When Byars began his Hudson residency in May 1969 he had already been working on the notion of questions for some time. In Antwerp in the spring of 1969, Byars persuaded the Belgian national broadcaster *Belgische Radio en Televisie* to air a live program devoted to the World Question Center. He lined up a range of people prepared to receive his phone call during the broadcast, where he would ask them for a question. The show was broadcast on November 28, 1969, and filmed at the Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerp. The broadcast opens with a shot of Byars sitting, flanked by two young women on either side, inside a wide circle of thirty people perched on the floor of an empty studio. It is silent and everyone is covered in an immense white swathe of fabric (actually pink silk, but the show was broadcast in black and white). It looks like some sort of religious ceremony, perhaps a coven meeting or a gathering of angels. As the camera slowly pans to reveal the faces of the group, a young woman's affectless voice introduces the program with a series of statements and questions such as: "Do you have an affection for questions?" "What is the speed of an idea?" "Which questions have disappeared?" "Is all speech interrogative?" "Do questions require more energy than other sentences?" "Think yourself awake." Byars, in his signature wide-brimmed hat, announces himself as the "self-appointed World Question Center." The artist asked variations of the same question—"Could you present us a question that you feel is pertinent with regard to the evolution of your own knowledge?"—to a number of intellectuals, artists, and scientists. Some are sitting within the circle, most are speaking over the telephone.¹⁰

The experts Byars was able to persuade to participate constitute an odd but reasonably representative mix of vogueish late-1960s figures. Among the Belgian contingent are Ferdinand Peeters (the man responsible for developing

the first contraceptive pill outside the US), the writer Georges Adé, and artists Jean Toche and Marcel Broodthaers. Also participating are, among others, John Cage, Luciano Berio, Walter Hopps, Cedric Price, Reyner Banham, Jerzy Kosinski, Arthur C. Clarke, and Robert Jungk. Cage, for his part, spoke by phone, and instead of asking a question used the satellite-echo laden transmission to beseech the audience to follow Buckminster Fuller's plans to create a "comprehensive design science" that would create a world for "living rather than killing."

The World Question Center broadcast fulfilled many of the requirements of McLuhan-era techno-utopian global-village theatrics, but as R. John Williams suggests, it is also marked by the influence of Kahn's and Byars's exposure to the futures-oriented speculation of the Hudson Institute (see Williams 2016, 516). Byars had been in attendance at a Hudson briefing with King Baudouin of Belgium when Kahn asked, "What is the question?" This was a pivotal moment for Byars, by his own account, not least because it reminded him of Gertrude Stein's deathbed query (Byars was fond of announcing that his influences were Stein, Einstein, and Wittgenstein). "What is the answer?" Stein is supposed to have asked. Receiving no reply, she is said to have continued, "in that case, what is the question?"

Byars's attraction to the Stein-Einstein-Wittgenstein triad is revealing not just of the artist's ability to bundle a linguistic accident into the strapline for a career but also because it locates the literary, scientific, and philosophical nexus of his enquiry in the form of the names of celebrated individuals. The names Stein, Einstein, and Wittgenstein stand for expertise in three distinctive domains of intellectual labor, and the network that Byars creates out of them provides a shorthand for complexity and experimentation without having to probe too deeply into what the connections between Stein's Jamesian experiments in literary temporality, Einstein's theory of relativity, and Wittgenstein's explorations of logic and philosophy of mind might actually be. Similarly, the Belgian TV staging of the World Question Center is all about the form and the performance; the discussion itself is fragmented, beset with technical difficulties, and often boring. As a performed instantiation of how technology can bring people together, it is uninspiring. More problematic than the staginess of the enterprise, though, is Byars's need to call on the experts, as if, in true think tank fashion, creating an interdisciplinary space within which great minds can come together will substitute for coherent critical thought.

There is a facetiousness to Chamberlain's request for answers that appears to be entirely absent from Byars's mystically inflected asking for questions. Chamberlain was clearly disappointed that RAND employees did not fire back

in an appropriately sophisticated manner, but he is not in thrall to the culture of expertise in the way that Byars appears to be. What Byars's World Question Center reproduces more than the interdisciplinary collaboration of the think tank, or, in a more utopian register, the collective intelligence of the global village, is the media sound bite, whereby complexity and debate are substituted for celebrity bromides. If Byars could have included Stein, Einstein, and Wittgenstein in his teleconference, what might they have been permitted to say, given the serious limitations of the format? An expert is an expert is an expert.

Stephanie Young is right to conclude that Chamberlain and RAND were each skeptical of the function of the other. Neither Chamberlain nor RAND materially produced anything, notes Young: "The technologists did not work with materials, and the artists did not make objects" (2017, 314). The move, in think tanks and in the art world, toward a technical expertise uncoupled from the material challenges and specificities of physical matter, was supposed to reconstruct the relation between knowledge and action under the conditions of postwar modernity. Defense intellectuals proclaimed the redundancy of conventional military strategy in the face of the nuclear threat; artists rejected medium-specificity and the production of unique objects as outmoded responses to the modern world. The challenge posed to the notion of the artist as skilled craftsman, which reached its apotheosis in the Conceptual Art produced around the time of Chamberlain's and Byars's think tank residencies, is, of course, driven by a politically, as well as philosophically, motivated institutional critique, but it is also a move that perversely aligns the artist with the expert bureaucrat who never sets foot in the theater of conflict. The failure of think tank solutions to the Vietnam War and to President Johnson's War on Poverty came, soon enough, to be seen as a catastrophic failure of theory to relate to practice, and that experts themselves, in their air-conditioned offices, were in no small part responsible for the outcomes of proposals they could only theoretically imagine. The assault on art-and-technology projects came largely from within the art world, as artists and critics began to identify precisely the failure of participants to factor their complicity with defense-related institutions into their relations with them. The wonder is not that RAND and A&T became the targets of radical challenges to the Cold War status quo but that it took so long for that challenge to manifest itself.

Neither Chamberlain nor Byars seem concerned with the ideological underpinning of RAND or Hudson, and they are prepared to take them at face value as thinking factories, not as ideology factories. The communication office at RAND cited Chamberlain as saying: "RAND's business is information" (quoted in Young 2017, 313), and after he left RAND, Brownlee Haydon said

that “John Chamberlain saw RAND as an answer machine: what else did a research organization do besides provide answers?” (quoted in Young 2017, 313). Among the many questions Chamberlain and Byars failed to ask is the obvious one of what constitutes a question in the first place, not to mention the issue of who is asking, what constitutes information, and what is at stake when information is a business? Chamberlain and Byars largely reproduce the conditions of objectivity, neutrality, and disinterest that validated think tanks as the intellectual equivalent of scientific expertise during the early Cold War. In the wake of constructionist and Foucauldian analyses of how knowledge is produced, their unreflective acceptance of the think tank as little more than the venue for the exercise of expertise appears hopelessly inadequate as a response to the complexity of how cognitive authority is established and disseminated within a hegemonic institution. More than this, however, the work Chamberlain and Byars put in at RAND and the Hudson Institute reveals the extent to which expertise had become a normative category to which even fairly wayward artists could subscribe. The main beef the artists had with the think tanks was that their own specialist knowledge was not adequately respected.

Corporate Art

By the time the A&T exhibition opened in 1971, what utopian spirit there might have been in the original ambitions for the project were unable to withstand the Vietnam War, Richard Nixon, and the shooting of students at Kent State University. The idea that US corporations could plausibly collaborate with artists to create new worlds of social progress was now evidence of complicity and corruption—technology was the problem and not the solution. The LACMA exhibition was taken apart in the art press, notably by both Jack Burnham and Max Kozloff in *Artforum* (Burnham 2015b; Kozloff 1971), and David Antin in *ARTnews* (Antin 2011). The reviews by Burnham and Antin both flagged the “corporate” nature of things in their titles, while Kozloff, in a review Burnham would later call “the most vicious, inflammatory, and irrational attack ever written on the art and technology phenomenon” (Burnham 1980, 210), called his response “The Multimillion Dollar Art Boondoggle.”

Burnham, for one, was clear that the problem with the A&T exhibition was timing:

If presented five years ago, A&T would have been difficult to refute as an important event, posing some hard questions about the future of art. Given the effects of a Republican recession, the role of large in-

dustry as an intransigent beneficiary of an even more intractable federal government, and the fatal environmental effects of most of our technologies, few people are going to be seduced by three months of industry-sponsored art—no matter how laudable the initial motivation. (Burnham 2015b, 187)

Although Burnham recognized that there was an element of posturing involved in showing outrage at the idea of artists working with industry (“it is permissible,” he noted, “to have your fabrication done by a local sheet-metal shop, but not by Hewlett-Packard” [2015b, 186]), he was nonetheless clear that the political climate made it impossible to justify what was now summarily dismissed as “industry-sponsored art.” At this point, the theoretical apparatus of interdisciplinary collaboration had fallen away and art and technology was viewed merely as a case of suspect patronage.

For Kozloff, it was precisely the easy seduction of money and power that was so contemptible about the project: as the country was falling apart, he wrote, “the American artists did not hesitate to freeload at the trough of that techno-fascism that had inspired them” (1971, 72). Even Burnham admitted there was “something grossly immodest” about the amounts of money poured into the project, and was also skeptical of the notion that corporations had any interest in genuine research symbiosis between art and industry—at best, he thought, companies might get a bit of good publicity for appearing “forward looking.” Billy Klüver and Maurice Tuchman were more than willing to exploit the public relations benefits available to a company willing to sponsor an art-and-technology initiative, but they also imagined, following Kepes, that the arts could exercise a more thoroughgoing transformation of industry if such collaborations were able to multiply and develop. As Burnham’s and Kozloff’s unforgiving assessments of A&T show, however, the idea of art and technology as a depoliticized zone was an unsustainable and damaging illusion.

One of the reasons it was damaging was because it meant that awkward, frustrating, or failed collaborations like Chamberlain’s at RAND were not given the prominence they might otherwise deserve. While A&T had to maintain a sense of productive symbiosis between art and industry, the interesting or revealing projects that cut out spaces or sat inert and offered only undeliverable outcomes were likely to be marginalized. It is to the credit of Tuchman and the A&T team that they understood this well enough to make the report as deep a reflection on the multiplicity of responses to the project as possible. Indeed, it is precisely when A&T did not run as promised that it genuinely started to do some serious cultural work.

Burnham and Kozloff may have caught the dominant cultural mood by aligning A&T with the enemy, but the challenge of generating collaborations with business was not so straightforward, and far from conspiratorial. Most corporations showed no interest in Tuchman's project, as Burnham suspected, and for A&T, like E.A.T., the main problem was getting their attention. Before Missy Chandler's intervention, Tuchman admitted, just making it through the front door was a challenge; even with Mrs. Chandler's considerable influence, over three hundred corporations declined to take part. Tuchman insisted that the response from senior management was positive once initial contact had been made, though among those companies willing to participate in the program, he conceded that it was rare to find anyone in middle management who understood what was going on with A&T. People could not believe, Tuchman explained in an interview with Pacifica Radio, that they "won't get burned by their higher ups if they co-operate" (Spark 1971). The "special kind of intermingling" between the arts and sciences Tuchman and Klüver wanted to achieve was only really possible, Tuchman acknowledged, with the support of a much more powerful body, such as the federal government, behind it. Despite his best efforts, Tuchman explained that he had received little support from museums, colleagues, and even LACMA's board of trustees. His hope had been to make possible in affluent Southern California the kind of collaborative work that lack of resources had prevented the Russian Constructivists and the Bauhaus from achieving. Like Klüver's staging of *9 Evenings* at the same venue as the 1913 Armory Show, Tuchman imagined A&T as the inheritor of a radical tradition; like Klüver, Tuchman believed that America could finally deliver what the Old World squandered.

Tellingly, Tuchman's assessment of A&T at the time of the radio interview, made in early 1971 before the exhibition opened, was already restrained by his awareness of recently changed economic and political circumstances. Business was cautious; antiwar sentiment had hardened public opinion against corporations and technology more generally. Like Burnham, Tuchman reckoned that A&T was too late, in Tuchman's estimation by two years. Billy Klüver and Maurice Tuchman appeared to take seriously the notion that the United States had become the natural home of the artistic avant-garde, and each pursued his vision of art and technology collaboration in a manner that conceived of it as a continuation and an enlargement of projects that had failed in the Old World due to insurmountable political and economic obstacles. While Klüver and Tuchman undoubtedly achieved a not inconsiderable amount in drawing together some of the most influential artists of the time with some of the biggest corporate players in American business, neither E.A.T. or A&T was able

to pick up enough support, finance, or critical momentum to see the project through the economically and politically hostile environment of the late 1960s and early 1970s. What their own understanding of their respective projects reveals, though, is a largely unquestioned assumption that American art should be considered on an equal footing with other professional fields of activity. As such, when businesses seemed uninterested or uncooperative, Tuchman's tetchy complaints about risk aversion in middle management served to account for corporate indifference as an organizational weakness in line with popular notions of American conformism. This is another version of Chamberlain's disappointment with the RAND staff—if only they were not so bourgeois, something brilliant might have happened. To an extent, then, while the national economic and political climate provided a compelling explanation for the deflated ambitions of art-and-technology projects like E.A.T. and A&T, a more painful assessment, and one that Tuchman was unwilling to face, was that business just could not care less about them.

At this point, if the attempt by Klüver and Tuchman to hook their projects up to the remains of the European collectivist avant-garde did not already seem far-fetched, it must by now be seen as, at the very least, willfully decontextualized. What is most peculiar about the Americans' desire to align themselves with aspects of Constructivism and Futurism, though it is quite in keeping with broader US cultural strategies during the Cold War, is the absence of any discussion of the political implications of either the work of European and Russian precursors or the new American art-and-technology projects themselves. During the Pacifica Radio interview, Tuchman is asked directly by interviewer Clare Spark whether he thinks the "lack of political content in modern art" has made it possible to achieve collaborations with government and industry in ways that would not have been previously possible. Tuchman's response is, disappointingly, formalist boilerplate: "Stalin found that there was enormous political content in abstract art and so did Hitler. And they were right. I think there is terrific political content in a Frank Stella painting" (Spark 1971). There is no direct discussion by Tuchman of what the political ramifications of an art-and-technology project might be (or, for that matter, what is political about a Frank Stella painting), but Spark had asked the right question.¹¹

In her contribution to the A&T report, curator Jane Livingston also positioned the project as an inheritor to collaborative tendencies among the old-world avant-garde, yet her assessment, like Tuchman's, also remained aloof from politics and instead focused on limitations that seem rooted in their attachment to preindustrial or aristocratic (that is, premodern and therefore pre-American) forms. Constructivism and Futurism, for example, despite their

“attempts to embrace a socialist technology,” were not, according to Livingston, able to fully realize the formal implications of machine technology and mass production, and tended to focus on stylistic elements, representing merely the appearance of industrial forms. The Bauhaus emphasis on craft, likewise for Livingston, was a “serious ideological limitation” since it tended to “reduce art to craft” and saw the role of “organized technology” as enabling the elevation of craft to art (Tuchman 1971, 43). In the end, for Livingston, though these precursors continued to exercise an influence, it was one that remained “identified with a European sensibility,” which she obliquely associates with the “traditionally aristocratic” stress on the “unique object” that can then be condescendingly “mass-produced for public consumption” (43). Like Alfred Barr’s torpedo diagram, modern art for Livingston proceeded by way of geographical displacement, with the Europeans and Russians, saddled with inhibiting residual attachments, giving way to the full-throated modernity of the American scene.

If Tuchman and Livingston (and Klüver) were right and the United States was the proper heir to the European art-and-technology avant-garde, not least by virtue of having never been premodern, why was American industry so indifferent to the promise of such a collaboration? Spark’s question invites one way of attempting an answer, but the vocabulary with which a project like A&T might be described that keeps it a viable proposition for American business and, at the same time, a viable political challenge to bourgeois aesthetics does not seem available to Tuchman, if it exists at all. Neither capable of convincing corporate America that working with artists would lead to an as yet unimaginable future of innovation, nor willing to directly acknowledge and cultivate the radical underpinning of the movements they claimed as precursors, projects like A&T and E.A.T. failed to appeal, consistently and persuasively, to enough artists, scientists, or business leaders. There is a whiff of the old New Deal collectivist spirit in Tuchman’s passing comment that a bigger organization, like the Federal government, might have made it work, but it is a phantom remark out of step with rising anti-government sentiment on the one hand, and bureaucracy’s increasingly defensive crouch on the other.

James Lee Byars’s love affair with the charisma of expertise, whether it emanated from Herman Kahn, Stein, Einstein, or Wittgenstein, and his desire to work himself into an equation that included them all, is of a piece, it seems to us, with John Chamberlain’s defensive response at not being respected by RAND employees and Maurice Tuchman’s frustration with middle management’s philistinism. The artists wanted respect; they wanted their world recognized as professionally rigorous; they wanted their contribution to stand equally alongside that of scientists, engineers, and businessmen. Their disappointment

and humiliation, however muted or disguised, is a measure of their own fascination with, and desire to bathe in, the lustrous aura emanating from high-status, high-powered Cold War elites. Burnham and Kozloff may have also overestimated the relevance and influence of art in American life, but they did see clearly how asymmetrical the relationship between art and technology was in projects like A&T.

What is missing from Tuchman's assessment of A&T, and what might have saved it from the mauling the exhibition received, is a sense of irony. It is irony that makes Chamberlain's project interesting; it is lack of irony that renders Byars's World Question Center pompous and absurd. A broader awareness, and an embrace, of limitations, failures, reversals, insufficiencies, and accidents would allow the contradictions and tensions in a project like A&T to breathe and a critical space to develop within which they might be interrogated and explored. The A&T report saves A&T from itself, in a sense, because it undermines the bland affirmations of the A&T brand and addresses, to an extent, Tuchman's inability, or unwillingness, to think directly about the political ramifications of the project. The cover of the report, with its grid of hairy artists and clean-cut organization men, provides a compressed signal of the contradictions contained within that is either the smartest summative statement of the project available or among the most supremely oblivious designs ever to adorn the front of an exhibition catalog. With A&T, a disappointing lack of self-awareness makes it difficult to hold out in favor of the former. At the same time, the unflinchingly extensive documentation of all aspects of the project in the report indicates that the notion of the enterprise as an experiment has been preserved, even if the deadpan delivery offered by Kienholz's promise of expertise is, unfortunately, beyond detection.