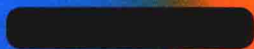
The Fall of the Studio
Artists at Work

Wouter Davidts
& Kim Paice (eds.)



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With contributions by
Wouter Davidts
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Introduction 1
Wouter Davidts
& Kim Paice

Studio Vertigo 23
Mark Rothko
Morgan Thomas

Continuous Project Altered Daily 43
Robert Morris
Kim Paice

"My Studio is the Place where I am (Working)" 63
Daniel Buren
Wouter Davidts

Illustrations 84

Seeing through the Studio 93
Bruce Nauman
MaryJo Marks

Portraits of the Artist with Work 119
Eva Hesse
Kirsten Swenson

Creation, Recreation, Procreation **141**
Matthew Barney,
Martin Kippenberger,
Jason Rhoades,
and Paul McCarthy
Julia Gelshorn

Narcissistic Studio **163**
Olafur Eliasson
Philip Ursprung

Where is the Studio? **185**
Jan De Cock
Jon Wood

Biographies **211**

Acknowledgments **219**

Index of Names **225**

Index of Subjects **235**

Colophon **247**

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Introduction

Wouter Davidts
& Kim Paice

The artist's studio is in dire standing, or, at least, so many critics and artists would have one believe. In recent decades, this customary space used for artistic creation and production has been discussed widely, yet mostly in a casually negative form. Any praise is by definition considered to be ideologically suspect.[1] Indeed, ever since artists embarked upon the radical program of questioning and eventually overturning the traditional and conventional modes of production, circulation, and reception of artworks in the late 1960s, the studio has suffered a series of tragic blows. It became a prime target for critique, was declared to have *fallen*, and finally lost both its conventional prominence and mythical stature — its putative station as "imagination's chamber."[2] To many artists, the space not only accommodated, but, above all, represented a type of artistic practice, material production, and creative identity that they wished to supersede or avoid altogether. "Deliverance from the confines of the studio," wrote Robert Smithson in 1968, "frees the artist to a degree from the snares of craft and the bondage of creativity."[3] Just as the studio was experienced as a romantic straitjacket, an outdated and restrictive context for the development of new modes and strategies of making, distributing, presenting or experiencing art, the long-established mediums of painting and sculpture, which had traditionally been considered studio arts, were deemed passé, and likewise their tools and techniques seen to be irrelevant. New modes of production were developed and tested with seeming

urgency. Some artists simply stopped making works themselves and began outsourcing the production of

1 Isabelle Graw, 'Atelier. Raum ohne Zeit; Vorwort', *Texte Zur Kunst*, 13, 49, (2003), p. 5. This negative perception is certainly symptomatic of the persistent lacunae in critical scholarship on the artist's studio. In stark contrast to the spectacular increase of the field of critical museum studies, which has resulted in a wide range of publications, engaging disciplines as varied as art history, anthropology, sociology, and political science, the artist's studio has not yet received the full consideration that it deserves. The beginnings of the proposed consideration can be found in Caroline A. Jones's groundbreaking compendium about studio practices of key American artists, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996. More recently, too, there has been a spate of exhibitions that have presented the artist's studio as a vital topic in contemporary art (at the Henry Moore Institute in 2002, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 2006, the Kunst Akademie in Berlin in 2006, the Hugh Lane Museum in Dublin in 2006, and the Centre Pompidou in 2007). These shows have evaluated fundamental changes made in artmaking since the 1960s and also examined the means by which artists have questioned and reinvented the studio. For the respective catalogues, see Jon Wood (ed.), *Close Encounters: The Sculptor's Studio in the Age of the Camera* (exh. cat.), Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2002; *Stedelijk Museum Bulletin*, 2 (2006); Jens Hoffmann and Christina Kennedy (eds.), *The Studio* (exh. cat.), Dublin: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 2006; and Didier Schulmann (ed.), *Ateliers: L'artiste et ses lieux de création dans les collections de la Bibliothèque Kandinsky* (exh. cat.), Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2007.
In popular culture however, the studio still enjoys a high status. In January 2007, British life-style magazine *Wallpaper**, for example, ran a remarkable quiz-like article in the 'Art' section, entitled 'Private Viewing'. It showed photographs of a certain Gautier Deblonde, who travelled around the world to "capture the inner sanctum of artists." Readers were invited to "spot the clues" and "name the absent genius." The answers were printed in the last pages of the magazine. They revealed that photographs of the studios of such famous artists as Jeff Koons, Jasper Johns, Chuck Close, Rachel Whiteread, Luc Tuymans and Richard Serra had been included – some of which were easier to guess at than others. For more substantial and historical publications that have taken up the topic of the artist's studio as a photographical subject, we would like to single out Alexander Liberman, *The Artist in his Studio*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 1960; Lieven Nollet, *Ateliers d'artistes* (exh. cat), Antwerpen: MUHKA, 2001; and Dominique de Font-Réaulx, *The Artist's Studio*, Paris: Musée d'Orsay, 2005; Liza Kirwin and Joan Lord, *Artists in their Studios: Images from the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art*, New York: Harper Collins, 2008.
For the historical use of the studio as a backdrop for fashion photography, we would like to refer readers to the study by visual artist Joke Robaard within the context of the Research Group of Visual Arts of the Academie voor Kunst en Vormgeving/St Joost, Avans Hogeschool, and published as *Joke Robaard: Folders # 53, 54, 55, 56*, edited by Joke Robaard, Camiel van Winkel, Jaap van Triest, 's-Hertogenbosch/Breda: Lectoraat Beeldende Kunst, Avans Hogeschool, AKCIStJoost, 2008.

2 Michael Peppiatt and Alice Bellony-Rewald, *Imagination's Chamber: Artists and Their Studios*, Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1982.

3 Robert Smithson, 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects' (1968), in: *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack D. Flam, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 100-113 (107).

works of all kinds and scales to engineering firms and industrial manufacturers. As Richard Serra recounted in 1985, when he started to produce large-scale steel sculptures in the late 1960s, he was forced outside of a private studio: "The studio has been replaced by urbanism and industry. Steel mills, shipyards, and fabrication plants have become my on-the-road extended studios."[4] Other artists tried to circumvent the conventional division between the site of production and reception that persists in the system of studio and gallery, and opted for site-specific work, either inside the gallery itself or on remote locations — hoping thereby to subvert the tried presentational techniques of art institutions and ultimately to short-circuit the commodification of art. In 1971, Daniel Buren decided to reverse the dominant way of doing things and no longer to force the artwork into a course of eternal nomadism.[5] He ended his seminal essay 'Fonction de l'atelier' with the radical statement that his decision to work in situ compelled him to leave the studio and to "abolish" it.[6] Desires to make monumental earthworks and ecological art led some artists to reclaim derelict sites for their work — as was the case for Agnes Denes, who declared a landfill in southern Manhattan to be her "studio."[7] The endeavour of taking exception with any notion of a preset spatial ontology of the studio was also clearly at issue in the conceptualist renunciation or suspension of the materiality of the art object. When an artwork comes into being and exists as a mere idea, its 'creator' is no longer in need of a separate, let

alone an especially assigned and equipped workplace at her or his disposal. As Lawrence Weiner's notorious "declaration of intent" bluntly indicated, neither the construction of the piece by the artist, its fabrication, nor its actual building was a guarantor of 'art'. The ultimate existence of a work depended on the presence of a someone at the receiving end: "Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist, the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership."[8]

In recent decades, the desertion of the studio has become still more apparent and involved. In such films as *Trying to Find the Spiral Jetty* (1997) and *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* (2002), Tacita Dean calmly positions the studio as one among other lost and phantasmatic objects, as her camera

4 Richard Serra, 'Extended Notes from Sight Point Road' (1985), in *Richard Serra: Writings, Interviews*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 167-173 (168).

5 Daniel Buren, and Jens Hoffmann, 'The Function of the Studio Revisited: Daniel Buren in Conversation', in Jens Hoffmann and Christina Kennedy (eds.), *The Studio*, Dublin: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 2006, p. 104.

6 Daniel Buren, 'Fonction de l'Atelier' (1971), in *Daniel Buren: Les Écrits (1965-1990). Tome I: 1965-1976*, edited by Daniel Buren and Jean-Marc Poinsot, Bordeaux: CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 1991, pp. 195-204.

7 Agnes Denes, 'Living Murals In the Land: Crossing Boundaries of Time and Space', *Public Art Review*, 17:1, 33 (Fall/Winter 2005), pp. 24-27 (25). Reflecting on her *Wheatfield: A Confrontation* (1982), she explained: "*Wheatfield* sprang up twenty feet from the Hudson, one block from Wall Street, flanked by the World Trade Center and the Statue of Liberty. At sunset the four-block site was my studio. Exhausted from the day's work, I'd look out at the rushing waters of the Hudson and the yellow stalks of wheat waving in the wind, savor the heavy smell of the field and the buzzing of dragon flies, surrounded by ladybugs, field mice, praying mantis. I was on an island of peace, just a block away from the heartbeat of the city and evening rush hour on West Street."

8 Lawrence Weiner, as quoted in Alexander Alberro, 'Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977', in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds.), *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999, pp. xvi-xxxvii (xxii). This statement was first published in the catalogue for the exhibition *January 5-31, 1969*, New York: Seth Siegelaub, 1969, n.p.

languorously haunts Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1969) or Marcel Broodthaers's studio in Dusseldorf. Furthermore, it is now rare for art to be produced in a single spot and by a sole individual. Rather it comes into being on myriad 'sites,' via both physical and virtual bases, and through the collaboration of different people with varied skills and backgrounds. For that matter, few artists can be said to reside in one place. Most operate in multiple locations around the globe and participate in a network of multiple artistic, institutional, and socio-political 'actors'.[9] As Philippe Parreno, a celebrated exponent of the nomadic existence, relational activity, and collaborative practice that has flourished since the 1990s, remarked in 2003: "I don't need one studio, but I do need a lot of studios." His ideal studio, he continued, "would be one place made of many different places, (…) made of different qualities and useful in different time frames."[10]

The dispersal of the artistic workplace across globalized networks has led to the widespread acknowledgment of the 'post-studio' era. We often speak of or read about inhabiting a moment in history that is *past* or *beyond* the studio. Indeed, the space has been deemed on many occasions to be *over*, and *done with*. In the contemporary scholarship about art, the nomenclature of the 'post-studio' has become utterly commonplace. In both theoretical and critical prose the terminology is used frequently. And yet it is still challenging to determine precisely when and with whom this manner of speaking about the

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studio began. Although Smithson and Buren are often considered as the pioneering figures of 'post-studio' practices, neither one of them ever used the term, despite producing voluminous writings on this matter.[11] John Baldessari, who employed the term to describe a course he taught at the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, in the early 1970s, does not recall where he took the term from — "perhaps from Carl Andre," he guessed, in an interview in 1992.[12] Andre indeed coined himself in an interview of 1970 as "the first of the post-studio artists," although he immediately hedged that the claim was "probably not true."[13]

The history of the origination of the idea of the 'post-studio' is apparently as uncertain as that of 'institutional critique'.[14] Although both terms have played a

9 For a broad discussion of the roles and significance of art's industrial fabrication, we refer readers to the October 2007 issue of *Artforum* on the theme of 'The Art of Production'.

10 Kate van den Boogert, *Studio Visit: 'Alien' Philippe Parreno*, in *TATE*, January / February 2003, pp. 48-53.

11 Caroline A. Jones has observed that Smithson "aspired to become the first post-studio artist," only later to acknowledge that, "[n]either 'post-studio' nor 'post-modern' were yet common in Smithson's lexicon, of course." See Jones, *Machine in the Studio*, p. 270. In the sequel to Brian O'Doherty's famous book of essays, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (San Francisco: Lapis Press, 1976), it is quite revealing that the author does not use the term 'post-studio'. Rather, his succinct text reinvigorates our understanding of the importance and crucial role of the studio. See Brian O'Doherty, *Studio and Cube: On the Relationship Between Where Art is Made and Where Art is Displayed*, Buell Center/FORuM Project, New York, Columbia University, 2007.

12 Interview with John Baldessari, conducted by Christopher Knight at the artist's studio in Santa Monica, California, April 4, 1992; Smithsonian Archives of Modern Art; http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/baldes92.htm.

13 Carl Andre and Phyllis Tuchman, 'An interview with Carl Andre', *Artforum*, 8, 6 (June 1970), pp. 55-61 (55).

14 Andrea Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions to the Institution of Critique', *Artforum*, 44, 1 (September, 2005), pp. 278-283. In this brilliant essay, Fraser establishes that not a single one of the leading artists-protagonists of 'institutional critique' – including Smithson or Buren – had ever used the term.

crucial role in critics' and artists' parlance of the past four decades, there is no one person who can claim to be the sole author or exponent of either one. But in the case of the 'post-studio,' we should also consider the extent to which the term does justice to the current status and nature of the space(s) and place(s) of art production. Following four decades of the critical exploration of the institutional art regime and its paradigmatic spaces by artists, the studio curiously seems to be the only space of the so-called 'art nexus' that remains systematically endowed with the prefix 'post'. How often do we read or hear about a post-museum, post-gallery, or post-house-of-the-collector? Has the studio become the ultimate casualty of the neo-avant-garde's wishes to dismember the institutional apparatus?

Despite profound changes in the understandings and processes of artistic production in the 1960s, not everyone considered the studio to be obsolete. As early as 1968, Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, in their famous essay 'The Dematerialization of Art', recognized that the seeming evaporation of the art object in conceptualism could not be equated with a vanishing studio. On the contrary, with an explanation that is strikingly structuralist, Lippard and Chandler informed *Arts Magazine* readers of the notion that the studio was merely undergoing a functional, and not a fundamental, change: it was "again becoming a study."[15] Lippard and Chandler eluded taking up a funereal voice, and struck more

nuanced tones — albeit without examining the implications of their statements. Their assertions, however, prompt us to consider the historical dimension of the modern artist's studio, namely the relation between the workplace of artists and scholars, represented by the long-established historical model of the study. In that sense, the term 'studio' signifies more than an enclosed space for genius, creativity, or melancholia; and this resonates with the postwar abandonment of related notions of the author, and is aligned with the discourse of the 'post-studio'. The historical use of the term 'studio' sealed the gradual transformation of the early-modern artist's workshop from a place of manual practice to one of intellectual labor. It embodied the gradual blurring of the distinction between artistic and academic activities and thus could be said to emblematize a virtual condition of personal artistic reflection or 'studious activity' that permeates contemporary artistic ways of making.[16] In this respect, Lippard and Chandler then seem to hint that if

15 Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', *Art International*, 12, 2 (February 1968), pp. 31-36, as reprinted in Alberro and Stimson (eds.), Conceptual Art, pp. 46-50 (46).

16 For this understanding, we would like to refer readers to the brilliant collection of essays by Christopher S. Wood, Walter S. Melion, H. Perry Chapman and Marc Gotlieb, in Michael Wayne Cole and Mary Pardo (eds.), *Inventions of the Studio: Renaissance to Romanticism*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. In the introduction, Cole and Pardo explain that the current use of the English word 'studio' for the early-modern artist's atelier is historically incorrect. In English the word 'studio' does not appear in this meaning until well into the 19th century; in Italy, until far into the 17th century, people called the artist's atelier a *bottega*, or simply a *stanza* (room). The Italian word *studio* (or *studiolo*) refers to the room, or even only to the furniture of a scholar. Since the 15th century, artists have increasingly often also had a *studio*, where they collected books and all sorts of curiosities and to which they could withdraw for private artistic reflection, away from the busy public workshop or *bottega*.

conceptual art grants us a new understanding of the role and significance of the studio, on the one hand, and of the nature and identity of the space, on the other, it does so neither by discarding the customary model of the studio, nor by inventing a new one altogether: it revisits the stakes of an existing, yet overlooked model of the studio.

An analogous argument and approach informs the present compendium of essays on the artist's studio. Instead of upholding the accepted wisdom or narrative that *the studio has fallen*, this book ambitiously questions many assumptions that underlie the popular and international discussions of the 'post-studio'. It traces the shifting nature and identity of the artist's studio in postwar art and art criticism, both in Europe and in the United States, and aims to achieve this by way of detailed analyses of seminal artists' practices. The contributors are concerned with artists who are, to be precise, *at work*. So, the essays gathered here are devoted to individual practitioners and their understanding and use of the place of work — not necessarily in order to frame their practices *in* the studio, rather to analyse their practices *of* the studio — across media and geographies. Thus, *The Fall of the Studio* deliberately focuses on the artist's studio as key trope, institutional construct, and critical theme in postwar art. While some of the artists discussed here are canonical figures of the second half of the 20th century, others maintain highly active careers at the beginning of the 21st. All of them, however, partake in the staging, re-

staging, performing, critiquing, and displaying of the space and place of the artist's studio, in one way or another. While the list of the artists who figure in this study is by no means exhaustive or even representative of possible rapports that artists have had with the studio since the 1950s, the collected essays, nevertheless, present a succinct palette of significant positions and approaches; and this variety allows us to broach key medium-related, gender, cultural, as well as socio-political issues that lend specificity to our understanding of the institution of the studio.[17] Its wealth lies in the acknowledgment of the discontinuities more so than the continuities in practices of the studio.

One proposition that permeates the following essays is that the rapport of postwar art and artists with the studio is in no way transparent, as seems to be implied by the overly broad term 'post-studio'. While some of the essays here demonstrate that artists most closely associated with the romance of the studio have a far more complicated relationship with the space and its aesthetic regime than is commonly accepted, other essays insist that protagonists of the 'post-studio' era do not maintain so radical a distance from the studio, as is often claimed — either by the artists themselves or by their critical advocates.

17 Admittedly, the present collection of essays remains hopelessly partial and does little to examine and frame the subject of the studio within such methodological perspectives as post-colonialism, multiculturalism, and contemporary identity politics. Yet this would have required a different approach than that of gathering the papers we received in our call for the College Art Association's Annual Conference, but one we will certainly take into account when, in all likelihood, we expand upon this compendium in the future.

In the first essay, Morgan Thomas discloses the complex 'figure' of the studio that can be discerned in the work of the celebrated painter Mark Rothko, who remains closely and yet problematically associated with Abstract Expressionism. Even though Rothko's work "has been framed as emblematic for the limitations of the studio as it functions in modernist art," Thomas argues, "[it] opens up the possibility of an alternative thinking of the studio." Contrary to the reading of the "closed nature" of the paintings as a direct token of the painter's isolated, romantic, and heroic use of his studio, Thomas wants us to consider them "in terms of an aesthetic of oscillating forces." Rothko's paintings, and in particular the later ones that were commissioned for specific sites, are defined, she explains, by a "complicated and often volatile two-way traffic between the studios and the real or imagined destination," a series of quasi-cinematic moves that, Thomas provocatively says, produce a "vertiginous effect," not unlike the one evoked by the dialectic of site and non-site in the work of Smithson.

Next, MaryJo Marks lays out the blunt and sophisticated understanding of the studio of Bruce Nauman, an artist who most famously wondered in the late 1960s what it meant to be an artist and possess a studio to do all kinds of things in — when consciously "not start[ing] out with some canvas." As Marks demonstrates, Nauman embarks upon a self-reflexive examination of "the form of strategic deprivation," or the "deliberate loss of conventions, materials, or rou-

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