

On Artistic and Curatorial Authorship



With Contributions by
Fucking Good Art
Ute Meta Bauer
Tania Bruguera
Raqs Media Collective
Yvonne P. Doderer
Valerie Smith
Kristina Lee Podesva
Dorothee Richter
Marc James Léger
Marion Von Osten
Mary Jane Jacob
Gavin Wade
Artur Żmijewski

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Imprint

Editorial

Michael Birchall

This issue of *ONCURATING.org* brings together a range of interviews and essays, inspired by the symposium, “Why Artists Curate”, held by the Kunstbüro der Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg in cooperation with Columbus Art Foundation in July 2011. The feedback from this conference prompted a discussion on authorship in contemporary art, from artists, curators and artist-curators.

Walter Benjamin’s well known essay, *The Author as Producer* outlines that artists became producers when they shifted their labour from an independent creator reliant on conventional artistic apparatus, to an operative, in which the skills and accomplishments of the artists are transformed by the advanced technical content of new reproductive technologies’ place in art¹. This represents the very re-functioning of the relations of artistic production in the interest of the new definition of the artist. Therefore the artist is not bound by a closed relationship with material, or their own encounters with the world in the conventions of artistic tradition.

The role of the curator as a scholar and keeper of a collection has all but faded away. The contemporary art curator is no longer an expert on a particular period, instead the curator is an anthropologist, a reporter, a sociologist, an epistemologist, an author, an NGO representative or an observer of the internet². The figure of the globe-trotting independent curator appears to be most associated with contemporary art; this transitory figure is always searching for an opportunity for an exhibition or publication. The curator shares his or her labour with that of the contemporary artist. Both practitioners are reliant on the art market, engage in precarious work, maintain a connection with the international scene and their income is dependant on their intellectual and networking ability. These positions are questioned in this issue; how do they relate to new working paradigms and existing power relations in contemporary art.

Since the 1990s the rise of the curator has sparked debates on the level of authorship curators can attribute to a work of art. As John Roberts writes, “the artist becomes a curator and the curator becomes an artist not in order to advance to democratization of the social form of art, but as a democratization of the circumscribed professional relations between artists and those who seek to professionally represent it.”³ Not only is this about a “democratisation” of professional relations but also a merging of roles, artists may take on some of the roles and functions of the curator in order to produce artworks. In turn, curators may exercise their curatorial or authorial voice by assembling a set of practices and ideas together to formulate an exhibition or project.

This collection of interviews formulates a discussion on authorship in contemporary arts production and curation. **Artur Żmijewski** discusses his curation of the 7th Berlin Biennial, *Forget Fear* (2012), which set out to investigate the role of art

and its effectiveness within contemporary politics. Zmijewski reflects on the controversy associated with the biennial, as well as deciding to include his own work in the exhibition, *Berek* (1999). **Raqs Media Collective**, discuss joint-authorship and working across disciplines as both artists and curators. With particular emphasis on their latest project, *Sarai*: a program initiated in 2000, as part of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi, India. They present a range of models for successful collaboration with participants and how authorship can be shared.

Marion von Osten reflects on her practice as both an artist and as a curator, and what can be learned from both practices; defining herself as an “initiator-curator”. After working with several influential German curators, such as Kathrin Rhomberg and Beatrice von Bismarck; von Osten reflects on the process of collaboration and the question of “equal” authorship. Artist-curator **Gavin Wade** discusses his approach to curating and art making and how the two disciplines can intersect with one another. Wade discusses his *5 Acts of Art*⁴ where he proposes that art is exhibition, that art is not exhibited but that art exhibits, that exhibition is a fundamental function of being human, and the fundamental process of art. The collective **Fucking Good Art** discuss their collaborative approach to art making and how their practice intersects with curating and research. Their recent publication, *Italian Conversations: Art in the age of Berlusconi* (2011) offers a glimpse into Italy’s contemporary art scene and pays tribute to a tradition of artists publications that emerged during the 1970s.

Curator, **Valerie Smith** discusses her approach to curating *Sonsbeek 93* (1993), and how her process of engagement was influenced by other models at the time. Smith discusses her role as a producer – in constant dialogue with artists – to create an entire concept with complete authorial control. The curator **Mary Jane Jacob** engages in a discussion about authorship, curatorial practice and the history and future of public art. Jacob considers her role in the site-specific exhibition *Culture in Action* (1995) and her development of community-based projects. Both Jacob and Smith paved the way for socially engaged art work, their exhibitions in the 1990s framed the discussion of art’s renewed interest in the social during this period⁵. **Kristina Lee Podesva** reflects on authorships’ possible disappearance in the art-pedagogical field, by looking specifically at her *colourschool* (2006/7) project within her artistic and curatorial practice; in relation to historical, societal, political, economical and cultural contexts.

Long-standing collaborators, **Ute Meta Bauer** & **Yvonne P. Doderer** engage in a dialogue about audience – specifically how the public sees the outcome before the curator or artist – and what it means to work as a women in the global, (often) male dominated art world. The artist and initiator of the Immigrant Movement International, **Tania Bruguera**, reflects on her work with immigrants and how her work is viewed in the contemporary art world. As an advocate of political work, Bruguera talks frankly about some of her early work and contribution to Cuba’s art education, by founding *Arte de Conducta* (2002-2009) and her responsible approach to art making.

Finally, **Marc James Léger’s** essay, ‘*Homo Academicus Curatorius: Millet Matrix’ as Intercultural Paradigm*, considers the curator-as-analyst by examining the collaborative exchanges between two Montreal-based artists: Rosika Desnoyers and David Tomas. **Dorothee Richter’s** essay, *Artists and Curators as Authors – Competitors, Collaborators, or Team workers?* discusses artistic and curatorial authorship, from a historical position, in the context of Harald Szeemann’s curatorship of Documenta 5; as well as using the case studies of Fluxus and the Curating Degree Zero Archive.

Notes

1 Benjamin, W. (1934) ‘The Author As Producer’, *New Left Review* 1, no. 82, 1970.

2 Bude, H. “The curator as meta-artist: the case of HUO” in *Texte zur Kunst*, June 2012, pg. 114.

3 Roberts, J. *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade*, pg. 184

4 To be published in the forthcoming, Gavin Wade, *UPCYCLE THIS BOOK*, 2013, Sternberg.

5 Bishop, C. *Artificial Hells*, pg. 217

Between Hype and Attitude. Motivations, Presentation Strategies and Fields of Conflict for “Curartists” Winfried Stürzl

Winfried Stürzl looks back at the symposium, “Why Artists Curate” held by the Kunstbüro der Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg in cooperation with Columbus Art Foundation, 8/9 July, 2011

Two years ago an article in the magazine “Monopol”, referring to an exhibition curated by Adam McEwen in the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, was headed “The Trend towards the Curartist”. The subheading added, in somewhat sensational vein: “Why artists make better curators”.¹ Precisely because the article was restricted to a list of some famous names, failing to provide the answer it heralded, the reader’s attention was drawn to two things: first, that artists have indeed been appearing increasingly as curators since the 1990s at the latest, and the media take pleasure in reacting to this (as re-confirmed by the last Berlin Biennale in 2012 with Artur Ąmijewski). Second, that there are reasons for this development, but they cannot be summarised as easily as the popular journal would have us believe.

The publication of the article came during preparation for a symposium by the Kunstbüro der Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg on this very subject. Ramona Wegenast (the director of the Kunstbüro) and I had decided to realise this symposium as it seemed important to us to take up such an omnipresent phenomenon as the artist-curator in the context of the Kunstbüro’s offering to improve artists’ professionalism.² After all, in the south-west of Germany, the Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg’s sphere of influence, more and more artists were becoming active simultaneously as curators. Among other things, this was expressed towards the end of the century’s first decade by the foundation of a large number of project spaces or off-spaces.³ In this context we had noted that these foundations had seen the development of differently accentuated cooperations between artists but also between artists and art theorists⁴ – not always entirely without conflict, as can be seen from the sensitivities voiced here, in particular with reference to the problem of authorship.

In order to react to this diversity, we decided to invite artist-curators who work in very different models of cooperation together for the symposium. Besides performance artist Byung Chul Kim (Stuttgart), who intervened into the running of the symposium, our initial guests were artist, curator and critic Andreas Schlaegel (Berlin) as well as artists Gunter Reski and Marcus Weber (both Berlin), who – as a duo – had also been curators of the exhibition “Captain Pamphile” in the Falckenberg Collection in Hamburg shortly before. Andreas Baur (Esslingen) gave insights into his cooperation with curating artists in his function as director of Villa Merkel. And artist Tilo Schulz (Berlin) reported in conjunction with Jörg van den Berg (Ravensburg) on the possibilities for cooperation between artist and exhibition-maker. Dorothee Richter (Zurich) provided an introduction to the symposium, examining questions of artistic and curatorial authorship on the basis of historical examples. The symposium took place in the still existent Kunsthalle Ravensburg of the Columbus Art Foundation⁵ on 8th and 9th July, 2011 – an ideal cooperative partner and event venue thanks to its director Jörg van den Berg.

We knew that the phenomenon of the curartist had long been giving occasion for reflection against the background of a general rise of the curator figure in the art system. In the report by the German Association of Artists, for example, the subject was examined from a wide range of perspectives in the 2003/2004 issue.⁶ Power relations and the distribution of roles in the art system were the focus there, as well as questions of whether artists as curators could make a different contribution to “traditional” exhibition-makers or whether curators were perhaps making use of artistic strategies in their work that had led to their rise in the first place.

The art system has changed in recent years. The profession of the curator has become so popular meanwhile that in the German weekly newspaper “DIE ZEIT” shortly before our symposium one could read under the ironic title “Die Macht der Geschmacksverstärker” (The Power of the Taste Enhancer) that the curator had taken over from the artist, poet or director as the “dream job of the youthful avant-garde”.⁷ This hype, as we all know, has been followed by not only a popularisation but also an increasing professionalising of the work, so that now study courses in “Curating” are offered at many colleges and universities all over the world; there are also a large number of important curator’s awards or residency programmes. And last but not least, “curating” has also been long established as a fixed concept outside the narrower field of art.

Against the backdrop of these changes, today questions are being posed once more about the ambivalent relationship between artist and curator – and thus about the curartist’s understanding of self, as well. The June 2012 issue of the magazine “Texte zur Kunst”⁸, for example, was entitled “The Curators” and devoted to the topic of the relationship between artist and curator in detail. In this context it appears very informative that in many contributions and in many different ways, a plea is made to shift attention from the person of the curator to the activity of curating (Beatrice von Bismarck), to the “curatorial” field (according to Maria Lind, the field of “moving boundaries” as opposed to the more technical-organisational role of “curating”⁹), or to forms of collaboration or collective cooperation (Oliver Marchart). In his statement on the phenomenon of the artist-curator against the background of debates on authorship, Dieter Roelstraete even suggests dropping “categories specific to the art world such as artist and curator” completely – in favour of “the art worker”.

Ideas were mooted in the presentations and discussions of the symposium in Ravensburg that took up the current discourse as well as some fundamental questions. As suggested by the title of the symposium – “Why Artists Curate” – they included in particular consideration of the (individual) motivations behind artists’ inclinations to work on a curatorial basis at all. In addition, as a direct result of the speaker-structure, a strong argument was put from the vantage point of artistic-curatorial practice.



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“Ruthless Openness” (Andreas Schlaegel)

Andreas Schlaegel cited three possible motivations in his (self-)discussion and – as he called it – plea for “ruthless openness”: “Why do artists create exhibitions? First for the girls, second for the show, and third for the money – that’s rock and roll”, according to his provocative theory (based on a song by Lüde und die Astros).¹⁰ He referred to the concept of “curating” as “almost devalued”, as our “culture of permanent showing and equally rapid forgetting (with constant virtual availability on demand)” makes the curator’s profession and his original task – that of collecting and preserving – largely obsolete. Due to a declining willingness to subsidise culture on the part of the state and the pressure for “corporate/private” partnerships with museums, the picture he drew of contemporary art was that of a “battle field through which cultural terrain may be occupied and instrumentalized.” He suggested that this development in the art system forced curators into freelance activity, where they had no more to lose in principle – since they had no building or budget anyway.

Andreas Schlaegel felt it was logical that in such an environment artists are being called into action. After all, for them it was legitimate *per definitionem* to act in a subjective manner: the severity of an exhibition by an artist-curator could always be attributed to his/her artistic creative production and thus granted legitimacy as

Captions

- 1 Participatory performance by Christina Schmid in the performance bus. © Daniela Wolf
- 2 Presentation by Dorothee Richter © Daniela Wolf
- 3 Presentation by Andreas Schlaegel © Daniela Wolf
- 4 Presentation by Andreas Baur © Daniela Wolf

an extension of his or her work. And so ultimately, Andreas Schlaegel sees the basis for the growing importance of the artist-curator in the need for self-presentation as it encounters the imperialistic effects of our neo-liberal economic system. In connection with the media's increasing fixation on the artist-curator, however, he also pointed out a latent danger of falling for the out-of-date myth of the "artist genius".

"Competition, Collaboration or Teamwork?" (Dorothee Richter)

This worry, however, could definitely apply to today's freelance curators as well – though Andreas Schlaegel avoided further detail in this respect. After all, star curators like Hans-Ulrich Obrist, it has been possible to note for some time, experience an exaggeration in their perception and reporting as quasi-geniuses equivalent to many an artist. This close connection led Dorothee Richter in her opening talk to tie the phenomenon of the rising artist-curator into the historical development of the complex relationship between artist and curator. Starting out from Haralds Szeemann's self-staging in the course of "documenta 5", under the heading "Artistic and Curatorial Authorship – Competition, Collaboration or Teamwork?" she discussed the ways in which curators adapt "the various procedures of artistic self-organisation" and the ultimate consequences of this. As Richter demonstrates, there is also a gender aspect inherent in the established power relations. Her comments led to a question that became characteristic of discussions during the symposium: Are artists and curators competitors or collaborators "in a field where attributions are becoming uncertain but also mobile and negotiable as a result?"

"Why I became a performance-curator" (Byung Chul Kim)

The framework to the symposium took up these questions in the form of performative interventions thanks to the artistic and curatorial efforts of Byung Chul Kim. In 2009 the Korean artist living in Stuttgart already caused a sensation beyond the region with his "Performance-Hotel": there was no need to pay money for a night's stay if you presented a performance.¹¹ The same applied to the "Performance-Express" that Kim initiated from Saarbrücken to the Centre Pompidou in Metz (2010)¹², on which the subsequent concept for a Performance-Bus from Stuttgart to Ravensburg was based. In these two cases, the service provided – the journey in each case – could also be paid for with a performance.

In respect to the symposium, part of the performance took place in the bus, another during the event at Columbus Art Foundation. Byung Chul Kim structured the pattern of the contributions so as to make it seem that the work was left entirely to the artists while the "power of organisation" was restricted to the curator alone (alias Byung Chul Kim). Resting on the laurels of the artistic contributions, he ended his appearance with the words: "Now you know why I became a performance-curator." This was a remark that not only thematized, with a sidelong wink, the problem of power relations in the artist-curator relationship but also put it up for re-disposition with exaggerated irony.

A second performance, which Byung Chul Kim realised under the title "Intermezzo" together with Andreas Baur, director of the Galleries of the City of Esslingen (Villa Merkel), later approached the topics at issue from a completely different perspective. Both jacked up their racing bikes and went cycling together (as they do occasionally in "real life"), bit by bit, going to the limits of their strength, whereby verbal references between the top echelons of sport and the art business were generated: "Art is endurance / assertiveness / a battle with oneself / you need

targets / self-doubts / there are also rankings – top-class artists, first in the rankings” etc. At the same time, terms were used such as “teamwork” or “system of shared interests”, which culminated in the statement that the “curatorial situation” could also consist in mutual accompaniment – even “in an exchange of roles, that is, the artist becoming a curator and the curator an artist.”

“Specific Inner Viewpoints” (Andreas Baur)

In his subsequent contribution “A Gift of Iconological Comparisons – Wrapped in the Mantle of Institutions” Andreas Baur made it clear that such an exchange of roles could only take place to a limited extent, however, in an institution like the Galleries of the City of Esslingen – and from his point of view: when artists curate, the result is often “not compatible with the masses”.¹³ “Recourse to intensive, subjective experiences in the field of artistic practice,” according to the trained artist and art historian, could “not be shared, basically” with a wider audience: “The limit of exclusion” lies “simply in the depth of the experience, activity and reflection on it.” However, as Baur made clear using examples from his practice as a curator, it is certainly possible to place parts of an exhibition in the hands of an artist. In this way, for example, it may be possible to highlight colleagues of the artist-curator or to offer “specific inner viewpoints”, upon which he would not have focused as the director of an institution. The exhibition “5000 Jahre Moderne Kunst – Painting, Smoking, Eating” (2008) was such a case, curated by Andreas Baur together with Marcus Weber, whereby the curator invited an artist (also represented in the exhibition) to collaborate with him.

“Supplementary Show-Format” (Gunter Reski and Marcus Weber)

At this point Marcus Weber had already had some experience as a curator, as was indicated by his contribution to the symposium developed and presented together with Gunter Reski.¹⁴ Under the title “Almost without a Borrower’s Ticket between Prosumer and Author” the two artists presented exhibition projects that each had curated independent of the other in the last 15 years, but also their jointly curated exhibition of painting “Captain Pamphile – Ein Bildroman in Stücken”, which had taken place in the Deichtorhallen Hamburg/ Falckenberg Collection in 2011. The exhibition concept was based on the pirate novel by Alexandre Dumas. On the basis of this work, Gunter Reski and Marcus Weber had made a storyboard with possible pictorial motifs and then asked artists that they knew well whether they might be interested in working with them on this “picture story”.

This example illuminated some aspects regarding the motivation behind organising exhibitions parallel to one’s own artwork: for Reski and Weber, becoming active in this context resulted from “dissatisfaction” with the fact that specific artists – or even exhibitions – that one would like to see, could not be seen. In the retrospective study based on many concrete examples, however, it also became obvious that this development should be seen as connected, among other things, with the “powerful emergence of self-organised exhibition spaces and fanzines in the 1990s and first decade of the millennium” that “were sprouting rapidly all over in Cologne, Düsseldorf and Berlin” at the time. New forms of exhibition presentation or displays were developed in this context, which served to achieve a “new perspective”, positioning “one’s own work in a real sphere of reflection” or in relation to a “virtual circle of friends”.

Gunter Reski and Marcus Weber presented exhibitions curated by artists as a “supplementary show-format” that had lost the “after-taste of self-help” comple-

tely. Today, they said, “professional” curators were also making use of these “free artistic approaches”.¹⁵ At the same time, however, it was made clear in this contribution that the question of artistic authorship in a project like “Captain Pamphile” held potential for conflict and called for that very open and responsible dealings with one another. There is a need to inform all those participating quite clearly from the outset that they will have to be prepared to employ an “unusual, applied and commission-oriented working method”. The conditions of participation and presentation were openly negotiated in advance, therefore. In this special case, it may also have been helpful that ultimately the entire project was based on a story by a third party, i.e. Alexandre Dumas, which shifted the focus away from the curators to some extent.

A Question of “Attitude” (Tilo Schulz and Jörg van den Berg)

A year before the symposium, we were provided with a very obvious example of how differently an exhibition appears when an artist works as a curator following a powerful urge to stage his own work in John Bock’s exhibition “Fisch-GrätenMelkStand” (2010) in the Temporary Kunsthalle in Berlin: despite the more than 60 artists participating, ultimately this exhibition could only be perceived as a comprehensive installation of John Bock himself.¹⁶ Directly before this, artist Tilo Schulz had shown the exhibition “squatting. erinnern, vergessen, besetzen” in the Temporary Kunsthalle in cooperation with exhibition maker Jörg van den Berg – a truly «complementary» contrast programme when seen from today’s standpoint.

Schulz and van den Berg – in accordance with the title of their contribution – reflected on the «Relation between Artwork and Exhibition». Thanks to specific ways and means of staging, in exhibitions by this duo of curators who have been cooperating for some years now the viewer is caught up in an active process of perception: here, the focus is directed towards the «presence of the individual artwork», from which is spun «a web of formal and content-oriented references» to the other works being shown. In the case of the exhibition «squatting» with its total of 22 works by 17 artists, complex viewing axes and spatial situations emerged; but this was not all – the Kunsthalle had to be entered through three different entrances and exited again in order to experience the full exhibition. In this way the «space of art» and the «space of political remembrance» (Schlossplatz) remained separate, it is true, but also became interlocked «in the movement of the viewer».¹⁷

By contrast to the other contributors, Tilo Schulz and Jörg van den Berg thus focused on the art and exhibition practice in itself and managed without detailed discussion of authorship and power relations in the complex constellation existing between artist and exhibition maker. Ultimately, according to their thesis, it is not a matter “of the difference between curator and artist but of one’s attitude to the artwork, to the artist, and to the viewer.”¹⁸ This opinion puts Tilo Schulz and Jörg van den Berg close to the tendency presented at the outset: a tendency to direct the focus less towards the protagonists of today’s art system and instead towards the processes of curating in themselves. Even Dieter Roelstraete’s suggestion to refer to the “art worker” reappears here, albeit in an altered form.

Conclusion and Epilogue

The symposium “Why Artists Curate” proved to be – not least because of the participants’ very different experiences in curatorial practice – a forum for controversial discussion. While Andreas Schlaegel saw the artist-curator – definitely motivated by an urge for self-presentation – as a possible way out of the dilemma

of an art sphere corrupted by financial interests, Andraes Baur attributed to the curating artist a greater degree of special competence but doubted that his ideas and concepts could be conveyed in a manner suited to institutions and “fitting for the masses”. In turn, Gunter Reski and Marcus Weber presented the artist-curator as a necessary corrective in the art system, capable of filling empty spaces and serving as a model to “professional” curators as well. Tilo Schulz and Jörg van den Berg, finally, saw the traditional distinction between curator and artist-curator as obsolete and instead shifted the focus towards the attitude of each actor with respect to the artwork, the exhibition as a whole, and the viewer.

Seen from the vantage point of practice, the hype surrounding the artist-curator in the popular press mentioned above gave way to entirely different questions, directed increasingly towards specific competencies. Conversations in the run-up to this publication give a similar picture. Hans D. Christ (one of the two directors of the Württembergischer Kunstverein), for example, sees a perhaps slightly different approach adopted by curators with an artistic background («not purely discursive»). But the potential for conflict, he says, lies less in questions of authorship and far more where there is a lack of shared competence, e.g. when «there is no sensitivity, an inability to read things that are relevant to practice from one’s theories».¹⁹

The work of the curator – as Jakob Schillinger sums up, for example – consists in “mediating between works of art and the public by making them relevant, situating and contextualising them in a specific moment for the visitor.”²⁰ The claim that artists are fundamentally better suited to such a task than others is probably one we can banish confidently to the realm of popular press fairy-tales. But the idea that competent partners need to cooperate as sensitively as possible for the success of an exhibition, ensuring that the shared artistic-curatorial intention comes across to the public: this is a challenge that needs to be mastered afresh – in whatever constellation – with every new exhibition.

Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg

The Mission: The aim of the Kunststiftung is to support young artists in taking the first steps in their professional careers by awarding them stipends and providing them with publicity. Since its foundation the Kunststiftung has helped over 900 artists from fine art, music, literature and the performing arts. Besides awarding stipends, the Kunststiftung focuses its efforts on organizing exhibitions, concerts and readings.

The Model: Founded in 1977 above party lines by a group of members of Parliament and private individuals, from the outset the Kunststiftung GmbH has always had 200 partners. The Kunststiftung is primarily funded by donations. Donations come from all sectors of the population: businesses, city councils, private individuals. The federal state of Baden-Württemberg lends its backing to this model with complementary funding that doubles the sum of the donations – this structure ensures that private engagement is rewarded by public coffers.

The work of the foundation: Up to 10,000 euros are awarded annually in the form of stipends. Juries of experts decide on who receives the stipends. Stipends are awarded to artists under the age of 35 who live or were born in Baden-Wuerttemberg. As of 2012 the art foundation is also awarding stipends for art criticism, a first in Germany. Since 2009 the Kunststiftung has maintained a ‘contact office’ for the professionalization of fine artists (see footnote no. 2). The Kunststiftung maintains two studios in Berlin.
www.kunststiftung.de

Footnotes

1 Silke Hohmann: „Der Trend geht zum Curartist“, in: Monopol – Magazin für Kunst und Leben (online edition: www.monopol-magazin.de/artikel/20102189/Der-Trend-geht-zum-Curartist.html, 16.9.2010)

2 The Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg (see above) has been running the Kunstbüro since 2009. Besides individual counselling sessions, it organises workshops, seminars and lectures that deal with professional questions, discuss current topics and are intended to promote direct networking. These events take place all over Baden-Württemberg. The Kunstbüro of the Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg is funded by the Ministry for Science, Research and Art of Baden-Württemberg. In the years 2010 and 2012 the Kunstbüro was provided with additional funding from the state, which made it possible to carry out many larger symposia in the whole state, including the one presented here (www.kunstbuero-bw.de).

3 Cf. e.g. „Außerhalb – Ein Projekt zur Vernetzung und Förderung von Projekträumen in Baden-Württemberg“, ed. by Kunstbüro der Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg, Stuttgart 2011 as well as Nicole Fritz: „Plötzlich war der Raum da‘ – Aufbruchstimmung in der Stuttgarter Off-Szene“, in: Junge Kunst No. 74 (2008), pp. 44–46

4 Cf. e.g. www.interventionsraum.de, www.hermesundderpfau.de or www.kunsttresor.net

5 After 16 years, Columbus Art Foundation has had to discontinue its activities until further notice, apart from its cooperation with the ADV regarding the Förderpreis / promotional award; further information at www.columbus-artfoundation.de

6 Kunstreport 2003/2004. At this time, the managing director of the Deutscher Künstlerbund was Bernd Milla; today he is manager of the Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg (see above).

7 Tobias Timm: „Die Macht der Geschmacksverstärker“, in: DIE ZEIT, 5.5.2011, No. 19 (online edition: www.zeit.de/2011/19/Kunst-Kuratoren, 12.5.2011)

8 Cf. e.g. Texte zur Kunst, issue 86 (June 2012; special theme: “The Curators”)

9 On this approach, cf. also Maria Lind (ed.): *Performing the Curatorial – Within and Beyond Art*, Berlin 2012

10 The sections of text marked as quotations are taken from Andreas Schlaegel’s handout for the symposium.

11 <http://performancehotel.wordpress.com>; cf. also Tobias Becker: „Performance-Hotel: Wo sich Singen unter der Dusche lohnt“, in: KulturSPIEGEL 3/2010 (online edition: www.spiegel.de/kultur/

kulturspiegel/performance-hotel-wo-sich-singen-unter-der-dusche-lohnt-a-683568.html, 22.2.2010)

12 <http://performanceexpress.wordpress.com>

13 The sections of text marked as quotations are taken from Andreas Baur’s handout for the symposium.

14 The sections of text marked as quotations are taken from Gunter Reski’s and Marcus Weber’s handout for the symposium.

15 Beatrice von Bismarck recently noted once again that the rise of the curator figure in the art system can be seen as fundamentally linked to the artistic practices at the beginning of the 1990s (“interdisciplinary, interprofessional working methods”). The emerging visibility of the exhibition as a medium (“site-specifics, post studio practice and institutional critique”), as Jakob Schillinger added, played a part in this: after all, it is difficult “to imagine an artwork independent of the way in which it is presented. On the level of presentation, reflection and construction of meaning,” this leads to a “very close interaction between artistic and curatorial practices”; cf. the series of discussions „Zwischen Kunst und Öffentlichkeit“ in: *Texte zur Kunst*, issue 86, pp. 63–87, here pp. 63 and 69

16 Cf. e.g. www.artnet.de/magazine/fischgratenmelkstand-in-der-temporaren-kunsthalle-berlin

17 www.columbus-artfoundation.de/caf/extern-temp-kunsthalle.php

18 Handout for the symposium by Tilo Schulz and Jörg van den Berg

19 This conversation with Hans D. Christ took place in the Württembergischer Kunstverein in Stuttgart on 21.1.2013.

20 Jakob Schillinger in the discussion „Zwischen Kunst und Öffentlichkeit“ in: *Texte zur Kunst*, issue 86, pp. 63–87, here p. 63

Homo Academicus Curatorius: Millet Matrix as Intercultural Paradigm by Marc James Léger

But we who somehow are so tainted by cynicism, because of our helplessness in the ugly world which surrounds and presses on us, cannot we somehow raise our own hopes at least to the point of thinking that what hope glimmers on the millions of the slaves of Commerce is something better than a mere delusion, the false dawn of a cloudy midnight with which 'tis only the moon that struggles? – William Morris, "Art and Socialism"

Since the 1980s and 90s, museum and exhibition practices have undergone unprecedented and much warranted study. As part of this new development of the field of museum studies, curating has also received sustained analysis as a practice that creates a space for discourse and critique. Some of the ways in which curatorial theory has both surfed and suffered the neoliberal re-engineering of art institutions can be noticed in the almost schizophrenic breakdown between certain categories of practice, between making and theorizing (Rogoff), between artist and curator (O'Neill), artist-run centre and museum (Doherty), community centre and academy (Esche), avant-gardism and inclusion, production and presentation (Farquharson), and alternative and official systems (Möntmann).¹ Notwithstanding the investment of the New Institutionalism in the practices of certain key curators working in certain galleries and museums, the field is also capable of demonstrating once in a while that, as Pierre Bourdieu argued in *Homo Academicus*, a turn towards the originary and the ordinary is also a turn towards the alien.² In this regard, an art exhibition can be shown to be capable of providing its own context in such a way that the reading of it is not internal and the goal is an objectivity that does not lose the benefits of what is familiar. Here, the function of criticism is not the "international solidarity between holders of equivalent positions in different national fields," but rather, the presentation of a singular exchange in which self-analysis provides a useful description of some of the invariants of the genus *homo academicus curatorius*.³ In order to

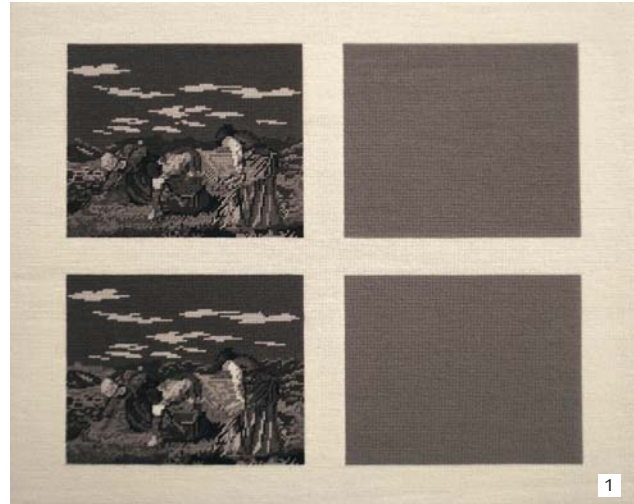
produce this objectification from the outside, I begin by asking: What is it today that promises to renew the belief in art's social value but which tends rather to reproduce the void of pseudo-satisfaction?

In "Welcome to the Desert of Post-Ideology," Slavoj Žižek describes the difference between pleasure and the psychoanalytic concept of enjoyment (*jouissance*).⁴ For Lacan, enjoyment as *jouissance* translates into *plus-de-jouir*, an excess-enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle. Within contemporary consumer culture, sated with novelty, society attempts to incorporate this excess into calculated pleasures. The function of enlightened hedonistic consumerism, Žižek argues, is to deprive enjoyment of its excessive, traumatic dimensions. "Enjoyment is tolerated," he writes, "solicited even, but on condition that it does not threaten our psychic or biological stability: chocolate yes, but fat free; Coke yes, but diet; mayonnaise yes, but without cholesterol; sex yes, but safe sex."⁵ Žižek argues that here we are in the realm of what Lacan described as the Discourse of the University, where pleasure is regulated by scientific knowledge and untroubled by the Real of enjoyment. Seen in this light, what might we be able to discern as the post-ideological coordinates of curating? One particularly influential document of 'post-ideological' theorization is Irit Rogoff's "Turning," an essay that calls on institutional players to stop lamenting what they can't control (the structures and processes of capitalist ideology), and to turn instead towards sites of possibility, potentiality, actualization, access, and so

on, “liberated,” as it were, from organized anti-capitalist resistance.⁶ Here, institutional critique is transformed into ‘institutional chic’; the emasculation of critical voices by biopolitical processes is compensated by curators who try to fill the void created by the diffusion of neoliberal state and market mechanisms. Similarly, within the realm of socially engaged art, the prohibition against anti-art gestures makes it such that institutions seek to unite desire and Law rather than oppose them.⁷ Curators today no longer prevent artists from drawing ties between aesthetics and the fields of class power and corporate money – they instead solicit critiques and deconstructions of all sorts, thereby effectively sabotaging them, reducing provocation to contractual mutual consent.

Beyond the matter of disciplinary societies and societies of control, part of the problem of today’s ultra-postmodern “insiderism” can be assessed as a matter of belief. Žižek argues that we often do not need to believe in something ourselves in order to believe but that we believe through others, or through external signs, symbols and other material surrogates.⁸ One of the functions of curating is to relieve us of the function of believing by effectively performing this function for us. Within the conditions of market capitalism, the curator mediates the proper relationship towards artists and audiences as subjects involved in commodity relations. In this process, a kind of “curatorial complex,” artists and publics lose whatever autonomy or independence they might have had and are reduced to part objects within an ideological matrix. Today these relationships are compounded as *social capital* increasingly replaces the kinds of *cultural capital* that were previously considered substantial enough to sustain a legitimate art practice.⁹ Networking, community, cooperation, collaboration, participation, potentiality: these can be and sometimes are the watchwords of increased interpersonal violence.¹⁰ On this score, and in terms of class relations, very little of our social exchange has been transformed since Marx characterized the rights of man as the paradise of “Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham.”¹¹ Given that so-called social mediation (social constructionism, performativity) is the necessary means to translate stakes in the world of class relations into the worldlessness of theory, contemporary curators and other institutionalized cadres call on publics (or better still, counter-publics) to reconnect with art – however, without believing in it themselves. The problem, then, is not that contemporary curating is theoretically concerned with critique, but that it does not do enough, in the terms of curating, to display and challenge the forces

that structure the impersonality of social relations. The emphasis that is placed on bodies, affect, language and identity (on so much “animal disquiet”) does very little to reveal those impersonal forces since this emphasis is understood only abstractly and avoids the concrete terms of social reproduction. Consequently, contemporary curating might very well prevent us from making difficult distinctions between conservative, liberal and radical perspectives, allowing art, with all of its post-ideological affinities with “the political” and “agonistic public spheres” to replace radical political organizing.¹²



Whereas today’s post-postmodern institutions continue to operate according to what Pierre Bourdieu defined as the function of art within class society, this social function is all the more difficult to assess as the majority of institutionalized players refuse the language of class distinction.¹³ One is more likely to find the values and politics of liberal ideology expressed in terms of pluralism and culture wars. This culturalization of politics, however, provides further

indications that few today continue to believe in art itself, that it is nothing but a bad joke unless it can translate into those kinds of struggles that are easily appropriated by the ruling classes and thus operate as stakes in a game that is framed by social mobility and utility. The art game becomes today a knowledge game, an experience economy or any other term by which the global underclass appears as only a problem that justifies the existence and rule of experts.¹⁴ As for the dark matter that Gregory Sholette identified as the raw material that feeds the art world, “the structural invisibility of most professionally trained artists whose very underdevelopment is essential to normal art world functions,” the system usually has nothing to say.¹⁵

How then to get past the liberal psychosocial drama that would pit cooperative artists, networkers and perennial insiders against resistant, difficult subjects?¹⁶ Might a practice that outwardly changes nothing but that questions basic institutional coordinates offer an alternative within a system that still needs art? Might the real threat to art’s dissolution be our non-belief in it and if so, what kind of curating is willing to acknowledge the most depressing aspects of all the talk about cooperation and collaboration?¹⁷ One particularly salient proposal has been put forward by Mark Hutchinson, who argues that in a universe of dematerialized practices, we need an analysis of collaboration wherein the curator operates as a kind of analyst or subject supposed to know – one who knows that he or she doesn’t know, but who can nevertheless “provide the conditions in which the patient can disabuse him or herself of the belief in the subject supposed to know.”¹⁸ In this kind of transferential relation, artist and curator are not in an equivalent relation, Hutchinson argues, but involved in an imaginary investment in, and, I would add, struggle over cultural capital. In the following I explore the potential of this idea of curator-as-analyst by examining the collaborative exchanges between two Montreal-based artists: Rosika Desnoyers and David Tomas.

In December of 2010, an exhibition titled *Millet Matrix I* was held in the apartment of Rosika Desnoyers, an artist who since the mid-1990s has been working with needlepoint as a means to explore operations of power and knowledge within university and museum discourse. The exhibition was focused on a distributed presentation of a work by Desnoyers titled *Millet Grid* (2006), which is comprised of two juxtaposed versions of *After Jean-François Millet, Gleaners* (1857), one from 2002-2003 and one from 2006.

Millet Matrix I was described as part one of “A two-part curatorial project by David Tomas.” Tomas is an established Canadian artist whose projects and writings have provided aesthetic and ethnographic explorations of the cultures of visual representation.¹⁹ *Millet Matrix I* falls squarely within Tomas’ ethnographically-based investigations. As he puts it, with regard to *Millet Matrix I*,

There is no question here of adopting the position of curator-as-artist or artist-as-curator. I would like to think of this practice as that of a transcultural visual worker, or more precisely, as that of a visual worker who is navigating in the unknown spaces that separate one artist’s practice from someone else’s and who is operating with an alternative – transcultural – viewpoint on the world, disciplines and knowledge.²⁰

Millet Matrix I was the third of Tomas’ transcultural curatorial ventures and acted as a kind of visual thesis, encapsulating the reasoning that structures Desnoyers’ needlepoint practice. The apartment installation was accompanied by a text by Tomas titled “Programming and Reprogramming Artworks: A Case of Painting and Practicing Conceptual and Media Art by Other Means,” published in the Spring 2009 issue of the Université de Montréal journal *Intermédialités*.²¹ Whereas Tomas is a Professor of Visual Arts at the Université du Québec à Montréal, Desnoyers is a graduate of the doctoral Humanities Interdisciplinary Program at Concordia University. Tomas has been Desnoyers’ teacher and friend since the early 1990s and is presently acting as her post-doctorate supervisor. While Desnoyers worked on the completion of her dissertation, Tomas curated his fourth exhibition, which was based on Joseph Conrad’s 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness*.²² A catalogue for this exhibition, titled *Live rightly, die, die...* (2012), was soon accompanied by a self-published artist’s book titled *Escape Velocity: Alternative Instruction Prototype for Playing the Knowledge Game* (2012).²³ These and other texts provide us with some valuable documents with which we can address Tomas’ role as transcultural worker. Following *Millet Matrix I*, Tomas and Desnoyers planned a second exhibition, *Millet Matrix II*, in which the black and white image of Desnoyers’ *Millet Grid* that appears in Tomas’ *Intermédialités* essay becomes the basis for a new needlepoint work called simply *Millet Matrix*.

Before I address the relevance of *Live rightly, die, die...* and *Escape Velocity* to the two *Millet Matrix* exhi-

bitions, it is necessary to say that after *Millet Matrix I* Desnoyers worked not only on her PhD thesis but also on the large *Millet Matrix* canvas – a work that took two years to complete.²⁴ In an unpublished document, titled “*Millet Matrix II: Between Commission and Collaboration*,” Tomas describes the way in which *Millet Matrix* came into being. He explains how the works chosen for display in the first exhibition were two “needlegraph” works by Desnoyers based on Jean-François Millet’s *The Gleaners*. Put together, these works comprise *Millet Grid*. In a separate interview document, Tomas describes *Millet Grid* in these terms:

The Millet piece foregrounds the notion of work that is so important to Rosika’s feminist and historical interests, as well as to her own method of production, since it is not only a painting about work, but it is also a painting about the work of women *in the field*. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the women in Millet’s painting are anonymous in form and character; their faces are hidden from the viewer because of the way they engage with the serial and mechanical task. The two Millets in Rosika’s work were bought on ebay and their authors are unknown. (...)

While each work might appear to be a straightforward reworking of an original needlepoint based on the errors that Rosika has discovered in the original, which leads to the production of a second “monochrome” work punctuated with “holes” created by the absence of one or more stitches, each work is *also* a kind of portal into the social and aesthetic history of the medium, as well as a commentary on the *work* of art’s theoretical place today. Each work is the result of an articulation of a double authorial logic (original and a copy that is also an original) as well as an exploration of the divided and differed nature of the original in each case (original *and* copy). (...)

The mark of individuality, the author’s signature, is encoded in a series of absences – a pattern of holes – in a monochromatic field. By revealing its pattern, Rosika is replacing herself as author through the very process through which she creates her fiction as author of the final work.²⁵

Millet Grid, as it was reproduced in black and white in Tomas’ essay, becomes the pattern, or model

image for *Millet Matrix*, folding Desnoyers’ art practice directly into the context of Tomas’ theoretical writing about her work and within the framework of a two-part apartment exhibition. In “*Millet Matrix II: Between Commission and Collaboration*,” Tomas states that *Millet Matrix I* raised the question of the “authorial politics of the curatorial gesture” in relation to “the dialogical model upon which it was based.”²⁶ He adds:

Millet Matrix II has taken form through a *commission* that was initiated in December 2010. (...) [T]he commission was used to trigger a mutation in *Millet Matrix I*’s conceptual, historical and genealogical logics through the production of a new work whose authorship resided outside of the basic parameters of Desnoyers’ practice (...) The result, in the case of *Millet Matrix II*, is a single ‘meta-work’ that transcribes and fuses *Millet Grid*’s independent pictorial elements. However, this work is not based on the original *Millet Grid*. Instead, it is based on a small black and white reproduction. The reproduction accompanied an essay on Desnoyers’ work – “Programming and Reprogramming Artworks: A Case of Painting and Practicing Conceptual and Media Art by Other Means” – that had been published in the Spring 2009 issue of *Intermédialités*, a Montreal-based academic journal. (...)

Entrusting a commission to someone is (...) to create an affective and principled bond of commitment vis-à-vis the project to be undertaken, in place of a pecuniary-based contractual bond. In the case of *Millet Matrix* (2010-2012), the relationship was based on friendship, trust and a common interest in exploring the possibilities of a practice.²⁷

One question that is worth asking in response to this text is the extent to which it does in fact, through the commission, trigger such a “mutation” in the artist’s historical and genealogical logics, or whether it actually details only some of the spatial and temporal possibilities that a genealogical project makes available.²⁸ To answer this one must consider in its entirety, and not only as one wishes, the general program of Desnoyers’ research project, which proposes a Foucauldian-inspired “genealogy” of nineteenth-century Berlin work, the precursor of what is today more generally known as needlepoint.

Desnoyers' thesis in research-creation has developed over the last six years as an unprecedented examination of the practices of eighteenth-century needlepainting and nineteenth-century needlepoint (Berlin work). Her work begins with needlepoint as a now submerged practice that reaches back two hundred years. In the early nineteenth century, Berlin work was the most widely practiced art form among European middle-class women. Despite this fact, and for complex historical reasons, it has hitherto escaped serious scholarly study. Desnoyers' investigation does not seek to fill in the gaps of scholarship with historicist narration, but instead looks at the history of writing about embroidery for clues concerning the various discursive formations that could on the one hand account for its immense popularity in the early nineteenth century, and on the other, its decline and "submersion" at the time of the rise of a discourse of aesthetic autonomy. Some of the fields of investigation that she tracks include: the shift from aristocratic amateur artists in the eighteenth century to that of the making of the modern amateur; the importance of practices of copying (fundamental to needlepainting – for which prestigious paintings are copied in embroidered textile) in both learned liberal arts discourse and in entrepreneurial product innovation; the significance of an industrial aesthetic in early practices of Berlin work, a characteristic that would make it anathema to the Arts and Crafts movement and a foil in the rhetoric of the foundation of the Royal School of Needlework. By the turn of the twentieth century, embroidery historians and museum curators would lament Berlin work as a "mistaken art" that led refined embroidery away from its true potential.²⁹ The crux of all of this for Desnoyers is that, as she puts it,

Berlin work, understood in terms of genealogy, implies that the truth of needlepoint is not grounded in the past any more than it is in the present and that in each case what we have to contend with are discursive regimes that create truths about culture. Needlepoint is therefore a means for me to make work that incorporates a reflexive critique of the disciplinary regimes within which contemporary artists operate.³⁰

In this regard Desnoyers distinguishes her work from the aims and ambitions of contemporary artists who reclaim craft practices and who with this pretend to challenge museum discourse. She thinks of needlepoint instead as a 'problematic' that engages issues around technology, creativity and the social functions

of art, and that reflects upon artistic practice as a value-producing and meaning-making enterprise.

Given that Desnoyers describes her practice as neo-conceptual, it is perhaps not altogether surprising that Tomas could define her work as "conceptual and media art by other means." In the journal essay that became the vehicle for both the impromptu catalogue of *Millet Matrix I* and the source for the visual referent of the large needlepoint canvas, *Millet Matrix*, Tomas relates Desnoyers' work to computer programming, an association that is supported not only by Desnoyers' study of the proximity of art and science in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and of the historical ties between calculating machines, computers and textile weaving, but also by Tomas' numerous investigations of cybernetic systems as they relate to cultural practice.³¹ The grid-based logic of Berlin work charts links them not only he says to the basic methods of mass production, through a division of labour and through the automation of creativity, but to post-60s conceptual art practice as defined in particular by Sol LeWitt. Here Desnoyers' research area and research methods overlap with Tomas', in particular as he defines technologies in terms of multidimensional intersystems. In his book of essays on photography, *A Blinding Flash of Light*, Tomas asks the simple question, "What is a new technology?" The usual answer to this presumes a linear temporal schema in which an invention progresses towards a more contemporary version. Tomas' alternative is a "networked/intersystemic approach" that presents a series of technologies – the camera lucida, railway locomotion, perspective machines, photography, cinematography, virtual reality – assembled around a local network that links events across space and time. This relational history of media suggests that there is no strict determinacy to the presence of technologies and that "relationships are defined in multiple directions and dimensions."³² A new technology can therefore be understood in terms of the space created between different inventions as they intersect within a transhistorical continuum.

This idea of a relational history of media corresponds adequately to a genealogical method of research, which does not necessarily look to the past, to the moment of emergence or origins, to locate the most active truths or the most effective *agencements*. What both methods reveal are the ways in which knowledge is shaped by diverse practices and institutions. In *Live rightly, die, die...*, a large project in which Tomas operates as both artist and curator, the framework of *Heart of Darkness* is used to bring up to date

the correspondence between the “exhibitionary complex” and the “carceral archipelago” of today’s neo-colonial relations. Mediating both worlds are the rapidly mutating artistic and intellectual practices of today’s culture and knowledge industries. If Desnoyers has chosen to pursue interdisciplinary research as a way out of the narrow confines of aesthetics, a field in which needlepoint is typically limited to only one basic register – women’s craft hobby – Tomas has addressed the parameters of such as escape. In the case of *Live rightly, die, die...*, his concern is ethnographic, proposing curating as a means to place the spectator in a decentered position regarding their own culture and as a way of estranging contemporary colonial attitudes.³³ However, in contemporaneous projects he is more specific about the locus of his field of study. In “Dead End, Sophisticated Endgame Strategy, or a Third Way?” he suggests that the center of gravity of institutional critique has shifted from the museum towards the university. Alternatives to traditional institutional critique, he says, should be directed towards a “self-reflexive ‘analysis’ of the university, its educational functions, systems of acculturation (disciplinary models and methods), economic and political affiliations in critical-institutional terms.”³⁴ This is precisely the task that he assigns himself in *Escape Velocity*, an artist’s book that traces the changing institutional and intellectual frameworks through which his practice has developed over the years. The university, he argues, “processes the art world’s human and intellectual raw materials and transforms them into viable products (artists, theories, and practices)” all the while “serv[ing] as a *measure of progress* (and ultimately of *viability*) against which to pass judgment on the archaic models of creativity that still dominate the art world’s culture, economy, and socio-institutional organization.”³⁵

In Desnoyers’ thesis, aspects of such an institutional history are seen in the formation of professional art academies in the eighteenth century, where elite amateur practices were routed and where the rules for annual exhibitions prevented practices of copying, all the better to improve the social circumstances of most professional painters. Working with needlepoint for her is in itself a foray into histories of domination and an elaboration of the conditions of possibility for a contemporary practice that by and large has remained anti-professional, obscure and resistant.

While contemporary curating emphasizes collaboration, and while contemporary engaged art highlights social process, art practices like those rep-

resented in *Escape Velocity* and *Millet Matrix* connect process and product and acknowledge the university’s role in the production and reception of artworks. To practice an institutional critique of the university is not to conform to Lacan’s Discourse of the University, in which systems of knowledge confront radical artists in a confidence game designed to structure belief within capitalist society at large, masking the social purpose of the neoliberal university as a space for the commodification of educational services; it is, rather, to propose something along the lines of the Discourse of the Analyst, in which artists confront audiences, presuming knowledge itself to be the function and purpose of the university.



It might in this context be worth noting that over the last year or so, during the exhibition of *Live rightly, die, die...*, the publication of *Escape Velocity*, the writing of *A Genealogy of Berlin Work* and the making of *Millet Matrix*, more than 300,000 Québec students organized collectively to prevent a 75% increase in university tuition. Protests that began in March 2012 gained momentum in May when the provincial Liberal government passed an emergency bill known as Law 78 (Law12), which effectively criminalized the strike. After months of civil disobedience and unprecedented demonstrations in which citizens added their voices to the students who later called for a social strike, the government opted for a kind of referendum through the means of an election. The failure of the Charest government to win another term and the rescinding of Law 78 should, however, be seen for the partial victories that they are. At the present time of writing, April 2013, the Parti Québécois government under Pauline Marois has given notice that negotiations with student organizations must move beyond “psychodrama” and towards mature renegotiation of tuition increases indexed to inflation. According to members of the ASSÉ (Association pour une solidar-

ité syndicale étudiante), the group that organized most of the mass demonstrations of the *Printemps érable*, the government's concern at the summit will be with "quality of teaching, accessibility and participation, governance and financing," code words for the further commodification of education and job training, and the building of market mechanisms based on price and quality control.³⁶ Given this situation, the conceit that there is no outside to capitalist crisis is hardly more intelligent and knowledge-based than collective acts of resistance. Against the now institutionalized hullabaloo concerning community and collaboration, I would propose fidelity to some of the terms within a *relational history of politics* wherein the words society, solidarity and socialism stand against the occlusion of art practices that refuse the postmodern 'no man's land' beyond left and right.

If the average contemporary curator helps to produce the artist as a commodity, the function of the curator-analyst is to display as openly as possible the material force of ideology. The present obsession with the idea of the curator as a collaborator is a false problem. Like Tomas and Desnoyers, institutional players should do more to examine the transformation of the artist within the new knowledge economy.

Notes

1 See, respectively, Irit Rogoff, "From Criticism to Critique to Criticality," *Transversal* (January 2003), available at eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en; Gerd Elise Morland and Heidi Bale Amundsen, "The Politics of the Small Act: Interview with Paul O'Neill," *On Curating* (2009), available at www.on-curating.org/documents/oncurating_issue_0410.pdf; Claire Doherty, "The Institution is Dead! Long Live the Institution! Contemporary Art and New Institutionalism," *Engage* #15 (Summer 2004), available at www.scribd.com/doc/32788979/Institution-is-Dead; Alex Farquharson, "Bureaux de change," *Frieze* #101 (September 2006), available at www.frieze.com/issue/article/bureaux_de_change/; Nina Möntmann, "The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism: Perspectives on a Possible Future," *Transversal* (August 2007), available at eipcp.net/transversal/0407/moentmann/en.

2 Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Cambridge: Polity Press, [1984] 1988) xii.

3 Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, xv.

4 Slavoj Žižek, "Welcome to the Desert of Post-Ideology," in *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (London: Verso, 2012) 47-61.

5 Žižek, "Welcome to the Desert of Post-Ideology," 48.

6 Irit Rogoff, "Turning," *Journal* #10 (November 2008), available at www.e-flux.com/journal/turning.

7 A good example of such policing of avant-garde excess is noticed in Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

8 Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001).

9 See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, [1979] 1984).

10 With regard to potentiality, Badiou teaches us that an event "is not the realization of a possibility that resides within the situation," but "paves the way for the possibility of what – from the limited perspective of the make-up of this situation or the legality of this world – is strictly impossible." See Alain Badiou, "The Idea of Communism," in Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek, eds. *The Idea of Communism* (London: Verso, 2010) 6-7.

11 Karl Marx, "The Sale and Purchase of Labour-Power," in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, [1867] 1976) 280.

12 On this subject see Alain Badiou, "Does the Notion of Activist Art Still Have Meaning?" *InterActivist Info Exchange* (November 19, 2010), available at <http://interactivist.autonomeia.org/node/13795>. See also Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London: Verso, 2012).

13 See Marc James Léger, "Welcome to the Cultural Goodwill Revolution: On Class Composition in the Age of Classless Struggle," in *Brave New Avant Garde: Essays on Contemporary Art and Politics* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2012) 82-99.

14 On this see George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) as well as Marc James Léger, "Art and Art History After Globalization," *Third Text* #118, 26:5 (September 2012) 515-527.

15 Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011) 1-3.

16 To give one example, at the October 2012 Creative Time Summit, Tom Finkelpearl, Director of the Queens Museum of Art, compared Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X and recommended that artists be more like the former and cooperate with publics and institutions rather than take a militant stance.

17 See Karl Marx, "Co-operation," in *Capital*, 439-454; see also Christoph Spehr, "Free Cooperation," *Transversal* (August 2005), available at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0805/spehr/en>.

18 Mark Hutchinson cited in Dave Beech and Mark Hutchinson, "Inconsequent Bayonets? A Correspondence on Curation, Independence and Collaboration," in Paul O'Neill, ed. *Curating Subjects* (London: Open Editions, 2007) 56.

19 Tomas' writings and projects are presented on his website at <http://www.er.uqam.ca/nobel/dtomas/>.

20 David Tomas cited in Marc James Léger, "An Interview with David Tomas Concerning His Recent Collaboration with Rosika Desnoyers, Part I," *Etc* #93 (Jun-Aug 2011) 46.

21 David Tomas, "Programming and Re-programming Artworks: A Case of Painting and Practicing Conceptual and Media Art by Other Means," *Intermedialités* #13 (Spring 2009) 89-113.

22 See Rosika Desnoyers, *A Genealogy of Berlin Work: A History of Errors*, PhD Dissertation, Concordia University, 2012.

23 David Tomas, *Live rightly, die, die ...* (Montreal: Dazibao, 2012); David Tomas, *Escape Velocity: Alternative Instruction Prototype for Playing the Knowledge Game* (Montreal: Wedge, 2012).

24 The project was delayed by one year because the large quantity of grey wool required to make the work had to be specially dyed to the artist's specification.

25 David Tomas cited in Léger, "An Interview with David Tomas Concerning His Recent Collaboration with Rosika Desnoyers, Part I," 43-44.

26 David Tomas, "*Millet Matrix II: Between Commission and Collaboration*," unpublished document, November 2012.

27 Tomas, "*Millet Matrix II: Between Commission and Collaboration*."

28 See in particular Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) 139-64, and Foucault, "Two Lectures," in Michael Kelly, ed. *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994) 17-46. See also Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16:1 (Spring 1986) 22-7.

29 Desnoyers mentions in particular, A.F. Kendrick's *English Embroidery* (1905) and Mrs Lowes' *Chats on Old Lace and Needlework* (1908). Desnoyers, *A Genealogy of Berlin Work: A History of Errors*.

30 Desnoyers, *A Genealogy of Berlin Work: A History of Errors*.

31 See for instance, David Tomas, "From the Cyborg to Posthuman Space: On the Total Eclipse of an Idea," *Parachute* #112 (Oct-Dec 2003) 81-91; "Notes Toward a Metropolis for the Twilight of a Mind," *Public* #32 (2005) 94-107; "Harold Cohen: Expanding the Field: The Artist as Artificial or Alien Intelligence?" *Parachute* #119 (Jul-Sep 2005) 47-67; as well as the essays collected in *Beyond the Image Machine: A History of Visual Technologies* (London: Continuum, 2004).

32 This relational model challenges many of the assumptions of, for example, a text like Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer* (1990). See David Tomas, *A Blinding Flash of Light: Photography Between Disciplines and Media* (Montreal: Dazibao, 2004) 30.

33 See David Tomas, "Live rightly, die, die... Anatomy of an Exhibition," in *Live rightly, die, die...*, 7-26. See also Marc James Léger, "An Abnormal Tourist Itinerary: David Tomas's 'Live Rightly, Die, Die...,'" *Afterimage* 40:2 (Sep-Oct 2012) 14-17.

34 Tomas, "Dead End, Sophisticated Endgame Strategy, or a Third Way? Institutional Critique's Academic Paradoxes and their Consequences," *Etc* #95 (Feb-May 2012) 27.

35 Tomas, "Artist: Identity in Mutation" in *Escape Velocity*, no page number.

36 See Ethan Cox, "PQ sets date for education summit, Quebec students continue fight against austerity agenda for education," *rabble.ca* (November 10, 2010), available at <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/ethan-cox/2012/11/pq-sets-date-education-summit-quebec-students-continue-fight-against>.

Captions

1 Rosika Desnoyers, *Millet Matrix* (detail), 2010-2012, needlepoint, wool on canvas, 63.5 x 79 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

2 Rosika Desnoyers, *Millet Grid* (2006). Comprised of *After Jean-François Millet, Gleaners (1857)*, 2002-2003, needlepoint, wool on canvas, 30.5 x 24.7 cm and 29.3 x 24.7 cm, and *After Jean-François Millet, Gleaners (1857)*, 2006, needlepoint, wool on canvas, 30.7 x 23.9 cm and 29.9 x 23.8 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

3 Installation view of *Millet Matrix* (2010-2012) in the exhibition *Millet Matrix II*, 2013, curated by David Tomas. Photo Marc James Léger.

Marc James Léger is an artist, writer and educator living in Montreal. His essays in critical cultural theory have been published in such places as *Afterimage*, *Art Journal*, *C Magazine*, *FUSE*, *One + One*, *Parachute*, *Canadian Journal of Film Studies/Revue Canadienne d'Études Cinématographique*, *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*, *Left Curve*, *RACAR* and *Third Text*. He is author of *Brave New Avant Garde and The Neoliberal Undead*, and editor of the forthcoming *The Idea of the Avant Garde – And What It Means Today*.

Curatorial and Artistic Practice as Political Process: an interview with Artur Żmijewski

by Anne Koskiluoma and Anna Krystyna Trzaska

Excerpt of telephone conversation with Artur Żmijewski, 9th of January 2013

Anne Koskiluoma/Anna Trzaska: In an interview with the curator Pierre Bal-Blanc, for *Flash Art* in 2010, you state: "Maybe art is not as innocent as we think." You believe that art could help transform ruling orders based on hierarchy into a system based on cooperation, participation an engagement of individuals.²

In your curatorial practice directing the 7th Berlin Biennale, did you see new possibilities for this important change emerging? What were the outcomes?

Artur Żmijewski: The greatest importance for this Biennale was to check, whether art is able to create substantial results in political life, in social life, in our collective reality. I didn't think about economical results, which of course art creates. I had been thinking about certain political processes that people are involved in or conduct. The question was, if art is able to support actively such processes. That is, what the story was about, then my curatorial effort was to find and define these processes and to search for people who support them using artistic tools.

AK/AT: We read, that you managed to open up the Biennale for a different kind of public. For instance by deciding to abolish admission charges.

Could you tell us, if this opening towards the citizens of Berlin was noticeable during the event? Did the people use the opportunity by visiting the different exhibition sites, maybe even various times?

AŻ: Probably people who usually have no money to buy tickets came this time. Students and

people, who really count each Euro and each Cent and think about how much they will spend to buy lunch. You know, the majority of the citizens in Berlin are not rich at all.

AK/AT: Compared to the rather specific group of people that usually frequents art exhibitions, beside the students. Do you think the Biennale was attracting a broader audience also due to the fact of how it was discussed in the press?

AŻ: I hope so. I mean a good example of an audience; we usually do not meet at exhibitions are the people from Palestinian minorities. At the Biennale there were two projects concerning Palestinian issues. The first one: *The State of Palestine* by Khaled Jarrar, stamping passports with the Palestinian stamp. The second one: *The Biggest Key in the World*, the giant key, was dislocated from the AIDA refugee camp and brought to the Biennale. Therefore, many Palestinians were coming and visiting the projects. Some were even guarding them, especially this key, which was situated in the courtyard of the Berliner Kunstwerke. So, it was quite ordinary to observe Palestinian women spending time next to the key, some would even bring their kids along. Very unusual, let's say, very well visible people were present mainly because of this symbol, which was so important to them.

AK/AT: The 7th Berlin Biennale gathered enormous attention from the day you were announced as the curator. How did you react to this?

AŻ: The "enormous attention" itself was not of interest to me, but the potential to introduce certain

ideas to the people. I was focused on the formulation of the issue of the Biennale, which was from the very beginning a kind of political substance that is generated by art and culture in general. Later on when our work advanced, I realized what was very unique about this situation. It was the fact that I somehow “had” the institution, that I had access to the internal life of the institution. To the big secret of art industry, which is strongly institutionalized.

Now I had the possibility to use the institution, not in artistic terms, but in a political way. The state is composed of its institutions. The culture sector, including its institutions is part of the state. In this sense, we had access to the state itself. Metaphorically speaking, we had access to the state logic which is represented by administration logic, vertical power structure, oppressive execution of internal rules and paragraphs of the law, loyalty dilemmas and so on.



AK/AT: You received full praise for creating a sphere for discourse and reflection. At the same time there were strong reactions from behalf of the art scene and also some scandalising in the press. Do you think they felt attacked to a certain extent or even unmasked?

AŻ: Media or art critics write comments from a certain position. They usually understand art as a spectacle, as an activity conducted by individuals who produce fetishes, which corrupt peoples’ fantasies and emotions. The art object is constructed as a paradox or as a question without answer.

The art world is based on endless competition, which reduces relations between artists and cultural workers and fights for economical and symbolical profits. Of course art can be concerned with serious problems, like poverty or lack of democracy, but this discourse produces just questions and doubts. The knowledge educed out of it, hardly ever get’s transformed into political practice. The social engagement

of artists appears in form of an exception; a beautiful exception from a horrible, unchangeable reality. In other words, the prevailing art ideology is very dominant. If you represent such an ideology, how can you understand an art event which is driven by different wishes and by substantial political ambitions? An event that is set out to work as processes and where culture is understood as a kind of locally defined policy – goal oriented, effective and creating consequences in human reality. The 7th Berlin Biennale was occupying people who transform their political ambitions into practice, who are not afraid of working collectively, who create not fetishes but certain tools useful in this reality. No paradoxes, rather activism and art journalism – and purely defined goals – no questions.

For example, we were working with Marina Naprushkina, a Belarussian artist and member of the Belarussian opposition. She lives in Berlin and her goal is to liberate Belarus. By the time we met, Marina was working on a large publishing project. She was editing a newspaper in form of a cartoon book for the Belarussian people. So, she was smuggling the freedom of speech and a vision of the future to Belarus – different from the turbo-capitalism and different from the way of life called “consumption”. We offered her money from the budget of the Biennale and proposed to treat her on-going work as a Biennale project, in order to secure the continuity of it. The result we expected was the free circulation of information in Belarus, a country that is fully controlled by a dictator and his corrupted network; to publish a free magazine in a police country. We can call it art, because Marina is an artist, but at the same time it is pure politics.

Other artists, with the vision of art that is specifically based on this individual approach and competition, resulting in the production of strange fetishist objects, came looking for results of our research and claimed that it failed. And exactly, our Biennale failed the fetishist objects! There were no artist celebrities, no individuals. Even Olafur Eliasson, who is known for his object based work, proposed a Biennale project in close cooperation with a professional politician. Eliasson, who is perfect in constructing light objects, who is perfect in using advanced technologies to create installations, this time was just working with a person from the political world. No material presentation, just an exchange of concepts and experiences between two worlds: The world of professional art and the world of professional politics. Two different languages started to

be negotiated and the Biennale initiated this instance.

AK/AT: It is interesting that you decided to include your own work *Berek* (1999), this caused quite a stir within the art scene. Did you expect to face criticism for its inclusion?

AŻ: The film *Berek* was included, because it had been excluded from a show at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin in 2011³. So, if the people had no chance to watch it in one Berlin based art institution, they should get the opportunity to watch it at the Kunstwerke. In this sense my decision was a reaction to an act of censorship. So, in fact not the specific art work was exhibited, but the act of resistance, the reaction itself. This kind of censorship shouldn't take place, especially not in Berlin. I was blamed for being an anti-Semitic, while I was trying to deal with the cruel history for which in fact the Germans are responsible. In some perverted way I was transformed into half a Nazi. Later I realized that it was a strategy of, let's say, reversed attack. And this was not the only incident that we faced. The preparation

process of Martin Zet's campaign *Deutschland, schaff es ab!* against Thilo Sarrazin's book *Deutschland schafft sich ab*⁴, resulted exactly with the same. Martin Zet proposed to reduce the number of copies of this racist book, that were available on the market by asking people to send it to Kunstwerke, in order to make an art work out of the collected copies. Someone compared this collecting action with the book burning by the Nazis. As a result for his proposal Martin was berated half a Nazi, an emblem of evil. Not Thilo Sarrazin. We could observe how the access to internal German politics was controlled by German fear-slogans. Just one association with the action on Bebel Platz in 1938 activated a media hysteria, as a result the internal German politics and the internal debate became like a fortress.

AK/AT: The 7th Berlin Biennale closed in July 2012. There must be a huge evaluation process in the wake of such a large project. What is your personal aftermath or conclusion?

AŻ: You have to remember about one thing that I already said. What was unique about this situation



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as a curator, was to somehow “have” the institution. Everything we did at the Biennale was done because we controlled the power of the institution. We decided.

I cannot really repeat this. At the moment as an artist I cannot do the same, because I’m weak. It depends on the institutions, if they give me a budget for production, if they invite me or not. As a curator I had the opportunity to experience this absolutely powerful and unique situation and make use of it. Of course many people who work as professional curators, to them it’s daily routine. But I don’t know if the majority of them are aware of the power they have and what they can do with it.

We were trying to examine what we can do, how we can employ the institution of culture in a different way. We used this power to support artists who operate in terms of politics.

AK/AT: Speaking of artistic authorship, in your manifesto *The Applied Social Arts* you suggest that art could try and restore the original meanings of the terms: Autonomy, originality, opaqueness. “Autonomy then, would mean the right to choose a sphere of freedom, instead of being an extreme personality trait. Originality would be a sign of creativity and not novelty at all costs. Opaqueness would be indicative of the difficulty and density of a message and not it’s inability to communicate.”⁵

How important is artistic authorship to you as an artist? Do you see it as a form of self-proclaimed immunity while navigating all these social artistic structures? We are wondering what is your own position as an artist?

AŻ: I was blamed many times for not being original or innovative enough. Usually I answer, that there are many other artists who are original and create novelty. Why do we need new proposals again and again, if we aren’t able to consume what has been already proposed? What I’m saying in the essay is, that we should stop for a moment and think about what is already on the table and how we can use it, instead of looking constantly for something new.

For the Biennale I didn’t invent the idea of useful art, I didn’t invent the idea of political art or artists involved in political processes. It was done before, years ago. But this idea has been discredited so many times. People say it’s dangerous, because it reminds them of Stalin, Lenin, Speer, and so on. The counterpoint in these discussions about political art

is always Stalin, or Leni Riefenstahl. Our intention was not about confronting people with completely new ideas, but to use the old idea and check it again. Our aim was to forget about artistic autonomy, to transform such an idea into a spectrum of substantial projects; a proposal for substantial transformations. If we want to be involved in political processes with our work of art, how can we keep autonomy? If we want to take part in the on going transformation of society, how can we keep distance to it? So, the main idea behind the Biennale was to join society. Art and artists should join society – really forget about the distance to it.

AK/AT: After having the opportunity of curating the Berlin Biennale, has it also changed your relationship towards curators; since you now have all this background information through your own experiences?

AŻ: It can’t change my relationship to them. I depend on them. But in some cases I know what kind of power they have. I think an alternative use of this power is blocked by the dominant ideology of art and culture – that art and culture are somehow for nothing and never have a political aim.

AK/AT: Is that the notion of the “end of art”?

AŻ: No, I don’t think it’s the end. I believe in art. It is a great tool, which activates and supports human creativity. I think it could happen that art and culture create real changes. There are very good examples of artistic actions, which transform reality.

For instance Antanas Mockus⁶, who is the son of a Lithuanian sculptor, has been creating long-term social projects, supported and even initiated by artistic actions, with no fear. He’s a mathematician and philosopher who quit his job at the Colombian University to run for mayor of Bogota. He was using art strategies in political work.

Among the actions that he organized was for instance this gun exchange, where people could come and exchange their guns for toys. I don’t know how many guns they collected, but it was a lot. They collected a significant number of guns. I think this an example that can be universalized. I heard lately of a similar action in Mexico, this time for kids. The children could come and exchange their toy guns for other toys, puppets, balls, and so on. These actions really transform reality on a very basic level. Less guns – Less killing!

Notes

1 FORGET FEAR, ed. by Artur Żmijewski & Joanna Warsza, Köln 2012, Buchhandlung Walther König

2 Flash Art, No. 272 May-June 2010, Pierre Bal-Blanc: In and out of CAC, Interview by Artur Żmijewski

3 Tür an Tür – 1000 Jahre deutsch-polnische Nachbarschaft / September 2011- January 2012 Martin-Gropius-Bau

4 *Deutschland schafft sich ab*, Thilo Sarrazin 2010 DVA Verlag München

5 APPLIED SOCIAL ARTS Artur Żmijewski, krytyka polityczna 2007

6 *Knowledge empowers people. If people know the rules, and are sensitized by art, humour, and creativity, they are much more likely to accept change.* Antanas Mockus. *Academic turns city into a social experiment*, Maria Cristina Caballero, Harvard gazette, March 11, 2004



Captions

1 Draftsmens Congress, 2012, Photo credit: Artur Żmijewski

2 State of Palestine, 2012, Photo credit: Kahled Jarrar

3 The Key of Return, 2012, Photo credit: Artur Żmijewski

Artur Żmijewski was born in 1966 in Warsaw, Poland, where he studied sculpture under Grzegorz Kowalski at the Academy of Arts from 1990–1995. Żmijewski's film and video work is highly recognized as an important artistic contribution. Best known for its uncompromising studies on the human nature, monitoring sociopolitical structures from an angle of being witness to psychologically violent acts. His work has been displayed in numerous international solo and group exhibitions. In 2005 Artur Żmijewski represented Poland at the 51st Biennale di Venezia. In 2012 Artur Żmijewski curated the 7th Berlin Biennale.

Kristina Lee Podesva

interviewed by Sophia Ribeiro

This interview offers a reflection on authorships' possible disappearance in the Art-Pedagogical Field(s) and transects this disappearance with the research practice of Kristina Podesva by looking specifically at the colourschool (2006/7) project as well as her editorship of Fillip, a contemporary art magazine based in Vancouver, Canada. Taking as a point of departure the varied practices of Kristina Podesva, the interview explores a diversity of questions, and possibilities for reflecting on the importance of authorship, its circulations (infusions, confusions, diffusions) within her artistic and curatorial practice in relation to historical societal, political, economical, and cultural contexts.

Sophia Ribeiro: *colourschool* was founded in 2006 when you were an MFA student at the University of British Columbia, with interest in the possibilities of post-studio projects, participatory practices and economic exchange¹. Could you give some more background insights about *colourschool* project?

Kristina Lee Podesva: My initial motivation in developing the *colourschool* project was to work with phenomena that have no definite, clear, or concrete meaning in order to showcase the highly contingent nature of knowledge, identity, and art. Colour was a symbol, but also a very complicated philosophical subject that necessitates collaborative signification. Knowledge, identity, and art also involve collaborative signification, but they are not understood or represented in such a complex manner. Colour and School brought these concepts together in a situation that did not have a social script already written. As a result, when participants came to *colourschool* there were no set rules or expectations and therefore everyone had to create a meaning for themselves within the context they found themselves in, which, of course, remained somewhat open, but also somewhat bounded by the setting of the university, the context of a visual art studio, and the loose parameters set by the presenters during each session, which were communicated via the *colourschool* website and a series of postcards that advertised the programs a month at a time.

SR: "A school structure that operates as a social medium; a post-hierarchical learning environment where there are no teachers, just co-participants; a

reference for exploratory, experimental, and multi-disciplinary approaches to knowledge production; a virtual space for the communication and distribution of ideas."² These are some of the concerns and characteristics, which you have observed in the Copenhagen Free University. Which other influences and/or additional aims have you considered through your *colourschool* research? Six years have passed since the beginning of the project, is it still active? What has changed?

KLP: *colourschool* had a lifespan of two academic years. Its first run occurred from 2006 to 2007 at the University of British Columbia. Its second run was from 2007 to 2008 at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design (now called Emily Carr University). During the first run, I was an MFA student at UBC and located *colourschool* in the art studio I was given while enrolled in the MFA program. Since I considered my practice a post-studio one, it did not make sense to me to do most of my work on a computer at home and not use the space I had at my disposal. At the time, I noticed that space at the university and in the city of Vancouver was very valuable. Rents were high and continue to be. Buildings on the UBC campus offered corporations laboratories and other facilities for rent. A large percentage of the apartments and condominiums on the campus were for sale not to students, faculty, and staff as affordable housing, but as moneymaking vehicles for the university. In this situation, where the university was a real estate developer, corporate client and host, it was clear that the institution was instrumentalising knowledge and that I needed to *detour* that process

even if on a small scale. So, I decided to re-confer the resources I had available to me as a student (e.g., space, internet access, books, information, and so on) to others within the university, but also to anyone else who might take an interest outside of the university. I wanted to make a space in which knowledge and learning were not easily instrumentalised. The suspension of this process by the institution and the hierarchies and orders inherent in the classroom were some of my chief aims, but equally I would say that I wanted a space to challenge others and myself with ontological questions about art, subjectivity, and colour. What all of these desires share, I think, was a frustration with certitude and authority.

After the second run at Emily Carr, I have to admit that I was exhausted because *colourschool* depended too much on me to run it. It is a failure in a way of the project since it would have been better to create a framework that others could use and manage. The *Public School* template (<http://thepublicschool.org/>) has created such a framework.

SR: According to Rudolf Frieling, “can an artwork include not only friends and peers, but also an undefined group of participants? How might the artist address a larger public without becoming simplistic, didactic, or compromised?”³ With *colourschool* you made it possible for all kinds of participants to be involved in the process, allowing the boundaries between artist and viewer to be crossed⁴. In which ways have you succeeded to address to an ‘all’ encompassing public?

KLP: I’m not sure that I made it possible that all participants were involved in the process. What I did was create a framework through which people could share with one another whether it was sharing a subject that they had a lot of knowledge about or a performance or an exploration of an idea that they had no prior knowledge of. Thus, if participants wanted to be involved, they came by their choice. For instance, I invited presenters to put on a program of their own design that related to colour in some way. And, each event drew its own audiences. Sometimes *colourschool* had regular attendees, but at other times there were people who came for a single event only. I would invoke here the words of Michael Warner who states in *Publics and Counterpublics* (2005) that, among other things, publics are defined by whom they address. Moreover, that subcultures and identities develop in this process of address. So, as soon as one utters or makes something, it is for someone. It calls a public into being by its form and act of

address. I think therefore that each program created new publics.

SR: What do you consider to be positive and negative angles of creating project archives?

KLP: First, I should state that the archival and documentation aspects of the project cannot really express nor supplant the experiences that took place in real time. So, why have an archive at all? I suppose that the archive was initially created (in its online iteration) as a way to get information out to people who might want to attend future events. This was the primary motivation. Later, it did serve as a record of what happened at *colourschool* so that others, if inspired, could create their own free schools no matter how unusual the area of inquiry. I think that the documentation of a project should be able to live on as its own entity not merely as a record of something that already happened. If it can be vital as a document beyond the moment it records, then I would be interested in producing an archival project. But, as you can see, it’s also possible to create an accidental archive, as I did with the *colourschool* website. Overall, I’m torn on this question of archives. I think it’s critical to activate them in a way that is not devitalized.

SR: In the essay, “The Artist as Producer in Times of Crisis”, Okwui Enwezor identifies and describes two types of ‘collective formations and collaborative practices’⁵. As an artist, editor, curator and writer, frequently creating, questioning, sharing exposing and analysing individual and shared practices, through written language and oral speech, which is your view in relation to Enwezor’s collective and collaborative dis-connections?

KLP: I have to admit that I am not familiar with Enwezor’s thoughts on the distinction between collectivity and collaboration, so I am not sure that I can respond to this quotation without the context to which it belongs. I can say though that my choice to participate in the field in a variety of ways is similar to how I think about artistic media—an artist must choose the best method of expression for an idea. The method does not precede the idea. Moreover, I see all of these roles as interrelated rather than separate. I take a cue here from the artist Luis Camnitzer. In *Fillip 17*, there is a review of an exhibition of his that took place in Vancouver, Canada in 2011. The reviewer at one point quotes Camnitzer as saying the following: “There are some problems that are best resolved in a photograph, there are others that are

best resolved in a discussion; others require a letter, because the people are further away, and then you have to think of what is the best form: by mail if it's private, or trying to publish it in a journal if it's not private. That's how all the things you mentioned come together, but the nucleus that organizes it is the other part, which is really what counts. It is critical questioning and the search of alternative orders that defines art in the best sense." This sums up best why I choose to work in so many different registers, to me, it is also the critical questioning and the search of alternative order that I'm interested in.



SR: In 2007 you wrote the essay "A Pedagogical Turn: Brief Notes on Education as Art" for *Fillip*, the contemporary art magazine from Vancouver, Canada for which you still work as editor. In the essay you make reference to one of the main participatory art contributors, the German artist Joseph Beuys, who believed "in the creative capacity of every individual to shape society through participation in cultural, political, and economic life"⁶. All around the world under direct influence of globalized structures, there are public and private institutions, which defend ways, which are "good" or "bad" to learn about Art and on how to become a professional with success in the field. Since this essay how do you consider educators, students, artists, curators linked to institutions and/or self-organised, are changing their sensibility towards

the importance of the 'Education as Art' instead of 'Education of Art'?

KLP: I do believe that there are signs that a shift has occurred in the relationship between the exhibitions, public programs, and education departments at museums. These departmental distinctions are breaking down in some ways at certain institutions. And with the dissolution of such boundaries, we have seen the emergence of certain trends such as "New Institutionalism" in which museums have staged educational programs and events that spectacularise knowledge, which looks a lot like the instrumentalisation of knowledge that takes place in the contemporary university. Interestingly, this spectacle does not seem to trouble many in the art world as much as a fear that programs and ephemeral art events might render exhibitions and material art objects less important. I find this fear ironic since museums were founded as institutions that educate the public. So, in a sense, to speak of an educational turn within museums does not really make sense since education has been fundamental since their very founding. I wish instead that we might ponder more critically how the museum can put into practice a new kind of educational imperative that is not instrumental or spectacular.

"What most urgently needs to be done is to further expand the space of art by developing new circulation networks through which art can encounter its publics – through education, publication, dissemination, and so forth – rather than perpetuate existing institutions of art and their agents at the expense of the agency of artists by immortalizing the exhibition as art's only possible, ultimate destination."⁷

SR: In November 2011 *Fillip* and *Artspeak* presented a three-day forum in Vancouver under the title *Intangible Economies*. What are some aspects presented in the forum, which you think relevant to and complement further the un-folding reflections about curatorial and artistic authorship?

KLP: New circulation networks other than the exhibition should be available to art. At the same time, I think artists should be able to circulate in spaces other than museums and galleries. And, in fact, they have been doing so for a long time, at least since the 1960s in North America. I cannot speak too much about *Intangible Economies* as another editor organized that forum. I can speak about the three-day conference *Institutions by Artists* that I organized

with many others in Vancouver during the middle of October 2012⁸. For that conference, I was very interested in restoring agency to artists since the discourse of art tends to focus on art, as an abstraction, rather than artists or curators or critics who are the agents in this field. By conceptualizing a program that surveyed institutions by artists, my hope was to first provide evidence that artists have already been operating outside of the museum and gallery as institutions through various artist-run initiatives. The relationship between artist and institution is not always antagonistic, in fact, artists have created institutions as compelling alternatives to existing ones, whether museum, school, institute, or other formation.

SR: According to Deleuze, “how else can one write but of those things which one doesn’t know, or knows badly? It is precisely there that we imagine having something to say. We write only at the frontiers of our knowledge, at the border, which separates our knowledge from our ignorance and transforms the one into the other. Only in this manner are we resolved to write. Perhaps writing has a relation to silence.”⁹ What you wrote yesterday might not sound relevant today, as it is always exposed to the possibility for not being understood. In which ways do you relate to silence when writing alone and in a group? What is your level of acceptance to the fact that knowledge is every day provoked by uncontrollable, unknown, unexpected societal movements?



KLP: I don’t believe in writing or any other form of knowledge as being finite or resolved. Rather, I think all knowledge must be open to revision, supplementation, and refutation even. I’m happy with that lack of certainty, so I am comfortable with being wrong or in error. There is still value in grappling with something with the information and tools and time and space available. When more information and variables change the significance or relevance of

a certain body of knowledge, then we are all the better for it. I’m much more attracted to an interrogative mode of being rather than a declarative one. I wrote about this preference in my text for *Judgment and Contemporary Art Criticism* entitled “Between the Question Mark and the Comma.”

Notes

1 Michael Birchall, “On Kristina Lee Podesva’s Colour School”, *C Magazine*, 2008, p.16.

2 Kristina L. Podesva. 2007. “A Pedagogical Turn: Brief Notes on Education as Art”. Fillip. Accessed December 11, 2012. <http://fillip.ca/content/a-pedagogical-turn>.

3 Rudolf Frieling. “The Art of Participation. 1950 to Now”. London: Thames & Hudson San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. 2008, p. 46.

4 Michael Birchall, “On Kristina Lee Podesva’s Colour School”, *C Magazine*. 2008, p. 16.

5 Enwezor Okwui. 2004. “The Artist as Producer in Times of Crisis”. 16Beaver. Accessed October 15, 2012. <http://www.16beavergroup.org/mtarchive/archives/000839.php>.

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7 Anton Vidokle. 2010. “Art Without Artists”. e-flux Journal. Accessed January 8, 2013. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-without-artists/>.

8 See <http://arcpost.ca/conference> for more details.

9 Gilles Deleuze. “Deleuze Difference and Repetition”. 2nd ed. Translated by Paul Patton. London: Continuum. 2004, p. xx.

Captions

1 *colourschool library*, 2006–2008 photo: Lauren Scott

2 *colourschool*, 2006–2008

3 *colourschool interior (UBC)*, 2006–2008 photo: Lauren Scott



Kristina Lee Podesva (CA/USA) is a San Francisco-based artist, writer, and editor of *Fillip*. She founded *Colourschool* (2006–2008), a free school dedicated to the speculative and collaborative research of five colours; white, black, red, yellow, and brown. The inaugural artist in residence at the Langara Centre for Art in Public Spaces. Her artwork and writing have appeared in Canada, the United States, and Europe including *Darling Foundry* (Montreal), *Museum of Contemporary Art* (Denver), *No Soul for Sale* at the Tate (London), *Dorsky Gallery* (Long Island City, NY). Published in art magazines *Fillip* and *Bidoun*, in books and catalogues such as *Turn Off the Sun* (forthcoming), *Waking Up from the Nightmare of Participation*, *Judgment and Contemporary Art Criticism*, and *Komma* (after Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun*). Kristina Lee Podesva is also co-editor of publications such as *Institutions by Artists: Volume 1* and *100% Vancouver*.

Public Art: Consequences of a Gesture¹? An Interview with Mary Jane Jacob

by Monika Molnár and Tanja Trampe



AUTHORSHIP: ART(WORK) – ARTIST – AUDIENCE. How would you describe the relationship between the three above-mentioned participants?

Mary Jane Jacob: Thank you for this trio, but it wasn't always that way. The artist and the artwork: that's the duo of commerce that dominated in the art world I entered, one overshadowed by New York as a center for showing and sales, an art world very much limited to the US. I'd like to think I did some work to change that.

One change was putting audience into this equation. To consider the fullness of this dimension was to enable audience as a participant in making the work with progressive contemporary artists—not community arts, art therapy, or the like—but actualizing the audience as co-author and involving them in ways that were more open and generous.

It was not to forsake the viewer, who can be moved personally in front of a work of art. Before I arrived at the new-public-art stand of *Culture in Action*, which we will get to in a moment, I had sought out the work of artists whose *personal* social engagement could prompt a response on the part of the audience. There was the drama of war and communist oppression or the Holocaust in undertaking the first US retrospectives of Magdalena Abakanowicz and Christian Boltanski respectively, the reimagining of one's home and history in the four-site show of Jannis Kounellis in Chicago and the eighteen installations that constituted a meditation on slavery in Charleston, South Carolina. But I felt to rethink the relationship to audience we needed to make a leap to a different edge of practice, and maybe then, after some assumptions were looked at anew, we might be able to come back and really value conventional gallery experiences, too.

Initially I thought this was a jump forward, seizing a new territory and shifting the discourse. But over time I came to find that I was not so much doing something new as perhaps rehabilitating some old ways. This included the mission of early 20th-century American thinker John Dewey and museum directors of that era who were in part influenced by him to make museum spaces for 'the people.' Their democratic notions were given another thrust with the freedom movements of the 1960s and 1970s. All this set the scene for my professional arrival, but it was only later that I draw a through-line.

We can say it was the hubris of youth to think I was working in a new way; we might see it as a desire to be a part of art's avant-garde. But I think I

had to experience the relationship of art-artist-audience for myself—first as an audience member, for a time as an art maker, and then arrive at being a curator. I needed my own examples, my experiences and revelations to know the meaning from the inside out. Then later, it was a validation to read Dewey’s ideas about how the artist makes the artwork only halfway with the viewer completing it, and how he believed that the artwork lives only in our experience of it.

Artwork-artist-audience is an interdependent trilogy. What’s left out of this equation is the institution. Having started in museums, I saw how they can offer the art experience, but also be a distraction or destructive to experience. There was the greater corporatization of museums as fundraising and marketing machines (what has been called the Guggenheim Effect). As I left museums in 1990 the ‘institutional critique’ of traditional modes of display was on the rise. So the setting was there for another way of working.

But I didn’t make this shift out of museums for any theoretical reason. It was my lived-experience of curatorial practice within the business of museums, and of the art experience that was growing increasingly secondary. I hoped to regain this (in part for myself) by developing artists’ projects in lived spaces [not so much working in ‘public space,’ as I was never a public art administrator on a governmental or corporate level], I found art could be realized in remarkable ways working in the spaces where people lives played out. There, art could have meaning, and could matter to anyone because what the artist and audience cared about were the same. We look back now at this as ‘site-specific’ or ‘community based,’ or ‘socially engaged art practice,’ but for me it wasn’t about naming a movement; it was necessary to relocate the relation of art to the place and people, as it had always been from time immemorial.

For me to realize this relationship of artwork-artist-audience, I had to get out of the museum, get the institution out of the way. The curator is not part of this series of words either, but I do think we can play a useful role.

The artist is present² is beyond all questions a quality characteristic. What happens if we replace this term by ‘The curator is present’?

MJJ: So I will speak to the need for the curator’s presence, even though left out of the list we have

just discussed. Curators can be more nimble where institutions are encumbered, though certainly institutions have resources that secure their place in the power structure. But what curators bring to the equation is care. It’s right there in the root of the word: cura.

I’ve just gone back to a classic book I never read before, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* by Robert M. Pirsig³. The author talks about what makes work an art: care. He distinguishes between being involved and being a spectator. This has something to say to the tired audience paradigm of participant vs. spectator and can offer greater depth of meaning. If we think about participants as an audience that is involved, that put care into what they are doing—even if sitting in a theater seat or walking through a gallery—then we see that there are many ways of engaging art. Interacting in some physical, visible participation is only one.

Caring, this engaged audience functions in a way parallel to the artist who is invested in the making of the artwork. For Dewey this connection of artist-to-audience was so fundamental that he said: “To some degree we become artists ourselves”⁴. Meanwhile Pirsig ties caring to quality, saying: “A person who sees Quality and feels it as he works is a person who cares”. So we might think about the experience of art, what Dewey called “an experience worthwhile as an experience”, to be an experience of quality.



This caring has a lot to do with curating. In fact, as I said, caring is at the essence of the curatorial function. Sometimes the curatorial role is assertive, taking control or challenging other protagonists, including artists and audiences, to take action; sometimes it’s more facilitating or, to use Pirsig’s metaphor, it’s good maintenance. But usually it’s a mix of all this. Curating done well, with care, is important to

the functioning of art. And I think the expansion we have seen in recent decades, the greater and more nuanced ways of curating, has developed in response to a demonstrated need.

CURATORIAL PRACTICE: EXHIBITION – ELEMENT – EXPERIENCE. What is the letter ‘e’ telling you: exhibition, element or experience...?

Monika Molnár/Tanja Trampe: We intend to force the direction on the influences and the results, if any (for example: exhibition, element and experience). How can the curator, the artist, and the audience benefit from ‘results’, if any? How are we able to declare a result? We learned from your work, that there are lots of influences. The audience can somehow evaluate the artist, the curator can use the audience’s experiences for future ideas, and the artist can be inspired through the outcomes and echoes from the audience. We are interested on these synergies: depth and size, strong or slight, or neutral influence as status quo or snapshot?

MJJ: I’ve been thinking about why we have exhibitions. What does an exhibition do that looking at artworks does not accomplish? If Dewey claimed that art is the experience, not the work or object of art, what experiences do exhibitions afford? What elements can we point to?

I guess I would say that the exhibition is a place where art can do its work. In exhibitions artists meet an audience, while having another way to experience their own art, so they become the audience, too. In an exhibition the audience gains access to art. While we think of this as access to the mind of the artist, the exhibition is a vehicle by which we can access our own mind. With such potential, the job the curator does matters.

For the curator, all the elements of the exhibition—I mean ALL, from the practical and mundane to the intellectual, visible and invisible aspects—affect the art experience, hence the artwork. With this in mind, the curator’s job is connected to those of everyone else’s in the making; the curator needs to employ a smart and critical outlook, as well as an aesthetic or tasteful eye. Reflecting on what was accomplished, how others reacted, the curator, like anyone doing a job they care about, is invested in an ongoing process that we can call a life’s work.

What exhibitions also do is acknowledge the place of the audience in the making of art as experience. The audience’s essential role in art is made manifest there. Here we see how art happens. This doesn’t happen for each of us with every work of art, but those that give us pause (and this can be positive or negative at the moment we see it, and can change or grow over time) can play a role in our lives. That’s why I make exhibitions.

How do you describe the main steps in developing curatorial projects? Would you like to open your curator’s toolkit and show to us your most important tools and describe them briefly?

MJJ: There are steps but they are not so linear, not so clearly progressive even though necessary to the process. For me, it starts with something that I have questions about, that I don’t understand fully. It starts, too, with an irritant: something that gets in the way of something I care about or value.

The next step always involves sharing these questions with others who care to be in the conversation and might illuminate the way, and this usually starts with talking to artists. This was not really possible when I worked in museums where the process was more protected and closed, institutionalized and sequestered. This sharing comes in the form of one-to-one meetings, small group or large for conventions, through writing emails or essays...there are many ways and I always end up using several with any given project. In fact, they become the modes of the project itself. I would not call them ‘para-curatorial’, as does Maria Lind, because I think they are fundamentally curatorial activities and because I do not subscribe to a hierarchy by which the exhibition is at the apex; it, too might be a step in a process on the way to something else, even if that thing wasn’t imagined at the outset.

But what is critical here is to stay open and let the process lead your intuitions, emotions, and ideas. I follow this messy, circuitous path, taking care to listen to the process and see where it leads. I try to steer or test rather than lead the process. It takes time to be with a question. It is an organic process of enacting questions out loud and with others, positing next steps, but changing them fluidly, sometimes instantaneously. So I need very patience, personally grounded, caring collaborators and staff who are not so invested in their ideas or a fixed plan, but excited about where a process can go and comfortable with the uncertainty of not knowing the way.

An example of this kind of process is charted in the introductory chapter of a recent book *Chicago Makes Modern: How Creative Minds Changed Society*⁵. In it I recount how questions about modernism today led us to think about questions of human and social development, about events in Chicago, to support the creation of projects by artists, designers, and architects who played with these ideas, to undertake many public programs, and to organize three exhibitions. Finally this book resulted but it does not document the process or the shows; it emerged as a work unto itself. Yet we didn't see this at the outset; to get there is to be engaged throughout the whole process. Like artists, like anyone doing what they care about and are invested in, the curator lives the process.

MM/TT: Taking care of the uncertainty and trying to keep it seems to be very topical within present curatorial processes: You describe a 'mind of don't-know' and the 'empty mind' as an important condition for your work. Carolyn Christov Bakargiev said that the word 'maybe' was the essence of her concept for last year's documenta13. Could you please go one step deeper and tell us how you organize yourself to keep the possibilities to play with during the whole developing process? Further: would you say that you mostly succeed? On your website we can found a list in eight steps, a kind of a recipe for exhibition makers. Can you tell us more about this recommendation?

MJJ: These lived processes are a little like describing wind: every time is different and you learn from experience guided by what you value. There is no formula, so I even hesitate to make what the list I wrote a few years ago, and which you found and include here seem like the answer, but, ok, it's a start. I have altered some of the points:

1. Locate the reason why you are doing an exhibition, the aim
2. Let art lead to you
3. Have partners in the exploration
4. Imagine opportunities
5. Openly venture ideas
6. Listen to artists
7. Listen to audiences
8. Care about the process
9. Trust the process
10. Trust that art will make things happen.



What are the major impacts for a curator seen from your perspective? Do we have main drivers? You described your recommendations to exhibition makers: Do we need to follow them strictly?

MJJ: In this process, the main—perhaps only driver that matters—is the problem: that swampy terrain of questions on a subject. The process begins murky with the problem not clearly determined, but I do not wait until I have sorted it out and have the precise thesis. Getting there is part of the exhibition-making process. And for me this is always a shared process of research, collaborative more or less, among many persons. I have to hear others and I absolutely have to hear what the process has to say.

MM/TT: We would like to take the thread again on the point of listening to the process: Asked in 2003 by the artist group World Question Center (Reloaded) you formulated the following question as the most important on that moment: "How can we truly relocate the nature of art to face and to facilitate our need for human communication, human connection?" Would you say that meanwhile—one decade later—this question has been answered? Or would you even modify the question? If yes, in which direction would you do it?

MJJ: I still think that art as communication and connection between people is something I strive to achieve because art, uniquely, can do that; it is a definition of art, what it does. So it is not something solved, but it is always a goal.

PUBLIC ART: IT'S HISTORY AND FUTURE
It's been 20 years since you curated
"Culture in Action" in the city of Chicago.
Couldn't you summarize the most
important shifts within the public art
field since then?

MJJ: *Culture in Action* started the same way: with a morass of questions about art in public space. It depended on artists' voices first, and each who participated in the show shaped where I took it. I had my motivating irritants, too: bad public art, too much public art, the use of public funds to build artworks that were inert, public art processes that conspired against creativity rather than inspiring new creativity, and little consciousness of the audience except to contain or pacify them in the process. This kind of work goes on and in the US it is legislated, ironically, where other support for the arts has fallen by the wayside in the last 25 years.

But today there is also an acceptance and belief of art that places the audience at the forefront. Artists who crossed thresholds two decades ago—having been agitatedly, even aggressively challenged by those who thought they had no right to step into this terrain and that their work was not art—have allowed successive generations to stand more firmly on new ground. Now we are in a great period of expansive experimentation. This explosion, the proliferation and fecundity of publicly engaged art, is important and embracing this excitement, as we go forward. So I grow impatient with debates such as Claire Bishop's of autonomy vs. morality because both can be present in a work. There are also more productive and less oppositional discourses.

What is your advice: How should exhibition making be expanded within the next decade?

MJJ: In the future, I hope we can take the participation and socially engaged discourses and widen them. There is much to be gained from looking at how art creatively intersects with other fields, building productive alliances rather than taking political stances that just point out what is wrong. And with this, we can also fortify what art can do out of and, maybe even in, museums.

That's why care is so important. Artists care about the questions they are working on. What they do is needed and useful, especially now. Curators take care as partners, cultivating ideas, holding open an exploratory space during the time of creation, and then caring for the exhibition of what was explored for a time, in a context, in an art way. Maybe we should alter your list: artwork-artist-curator-audience.

Notes

1 Daniel J. Martinez' work "Consequences of a Gesture" (1993), was one of the events organized as part of "Culture in Action" in Chicago (1991-95), an ambitious series of public projects aimed at a radical redefinition of "public art." It took the form of a parade developed by Martinez over two years and involving the participation of 35 community organizations and 1000 Mexican Americans and African Americans, children to the elderly. Participants paraded through three neighborhoods: Maxwell Street public market that was removed by the city the following year (1994) to make way for the University of Illinois's expansion, thus an ode to the market's demise after more than a century; and to two ethnically divergent areas of Chicago: African-American Garfield Park and Mexican-American Pilsen. For more information on this and recent works by Martinez, see: *Culture in Action* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995); www.stretcher.org; Daniel Joseph Martinez: A life of Disobedience (Cantz, 2009), www.frieze.com/issue/article/culture_in_action; *Exhibition Histories: Culture in Action and Project UNITÉ* (London: Afterall Books, 2013), Tom Finkelpearl: *What We Made – Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Duke University Press, 2013).

2 www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/965; www.regina-frank.de

3 Robert M. Pirsig: *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (New York, 1974, p. 34-35, 275)

4 John Dewey: *Art as Experience*, (New York, 1980, p. 348, 302)

5 Mary Jane Jacob, Jacquelynn Baas: *Chicago Makes Modern. How Creative Minds Changed Society* (Chicago, 2012)

Captions

1 Daniel J. Martinez, *Consequences of a Gesture*, Chicago 1993.

2 Haha, *Flood, A Volunteer Network for Active Participation in Healthcare*, Chicago 1992-95, commissioned by Sculpture Chicago's *Culture in Action*. A group of participants built and maintained a hydroponic garden in a storefront by cultivating vegetables and therapeutic herbs for people with HIV.

3 The exhibition *Learning Modern*, bridged the historic roots of American modernism in Chicago and its critical role in education in the mid-20th century, linking it to the contemporary critical practices of artists, architects, and designers, and was the center piece of the program, *Living Modern Chicago* (2009-11).

4 Wolfgang Laib, *Unlimited Ocean*, 2011. The exhibition at the School of the Art Institute of

Chicago Sullivan Galleries is one of the artist's largest pollen and rice installations to date.

Mary Jane Jacob holds the position of Professor and Executive Director of Exhibitions and Exhibition Studies at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she leads practice in curatorial training and is currently spearheading a major research project on Chicago social practice. As chief curator of the Museums of Contemporary Art in Chicago and Los Angeles, she staged some of the first U.S. shows of American and European artists before shifting her workplace from the museum to the street. Recently her programs have led to co-edited anthologies such as "Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art", "Learning Mind: Experience into Art", "The Studio Reader: On the Space of Artists", and "Chicago Makes Modern: How Creative Minds Changed Society". Among others in addition, Jacob was awarded the Women's Caucus for Art Lifetime Achievement Award, Public Art Dialogue's Lifetime Award for Achievement in the Field of Public Art, and as one of the key influential women in the field of visual arts in the U.S. In 2012 Jacob was awarded a Warhol Foundation Curatorial Research Fellowship.



Interview with Raqs Media Collective on the exhibition, *Sarai Reader 09* by Chloé Nicolet-dit-Félix and Gulru Vardar

Gulru Vardar and Chloé Nicolet-dit-Félix:

Since the creation of Raqs Media Collective in 1992, you have been working as artists and curators, exploring a wide array of mediums of creativity and collaborating with people from various artistic fields. How do you share this span of responsibilities and how do you question the issue of shared authorship?

Raqs Media Collective: All our projects are jointly authored. We do not identify any one of us as the ‘custodian’ of a particular practice or method or style or work process. The work that we do, artistically and curatorial, emerges and exists at the intersection of our triangulated curiosities, skills and desires. In some ways, we could say, that Raqs, which is more than the sum of its personified parts (any one of us as individuals), is the author.

G/C: *Sarai* is a program that you initiated in 2000, as part of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi, India; it is composed of researchers and practitioners, who strive to develop a model of research-practice that is public and creative, as well as a multidisciplinary space and a platform involving many ideas and artistic productions. What did you manage to embody in this interdisciplinary platform?

Raqs: What we managed to embody was a fundamental move, a refusal to sustain the rupture between theory and practice, between thinking and doing and creating and reflecting. Ours was a wager that the conversation between practices and methods was more important than the soliloquies of any one

kind of practice. We remain committed to that vision, even today.



G/C: You are currently curating the exhibition *Sarai Reader 09* at the Devi Art Foundation in Gurgaon, India; a living exhibition in the form of a series of unfolding episodes over time, with a continual transformation. What does the exhibition intend to investigate and what are the spectrum of possibilities?

Raqs: The exhibition investigates practice itself. Here, we mean practice in its fullest sense, as an ethic of making, as a mode of living thought. We are particularly interested in what we call ‘the sensation of thinking’. We are interested in the exhibition being a space where artists can develop their thinking, have conversations with each other, respond, not just to each other, but to time itself, making it possible for them to embrace the full spectrum of possibilities latent in their work process. This means not

being tied down to the final form of an object, but to be committed to make an art work travel the length and breadth of its own possibilities.

The potential consists in the generation of a different temporal rhythm, one in which things can grow, branch out, make connections. Most exhibitions focus on how an art object affects a visitor, here, diverse art practices are, in some senses, visitors to each other's presence.

They relate, not as frozen entities but as dynamic processes. They have changed in each other's company. This exhibition is an index of that transformation.

G/C: Could you give an example of how some of the practices in *Sarai Reader 09* engaged in a dialogue and altered as a result of this?



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Raq's: An artist who had been producing recorded 'auditions' found several participants amongst his fellow artists; another artist who was working on handmade chap books got many of her peers to write stories for her. A photographer created a self-reflexive archive of the exhibition that he

placed on site. An artist who works with drawings developed a new mode of suspending miniature cut-outs made from his drawings as a response to the work of other artists. A performance artist started what he called an 'unschool' of performance, which had several of the other artists as pupils. A graphic novelist made and erased a large wall mural several times, translating in time the sequentiality that she works through in frames. Each erasure was an enthusiastically participatory ritual. These are some of the discrete examples that come to mind, but more importantly, there has been a very alive process of osmosis.

G/C: The first episode of the exhibition opened on August 18 2012 at the Devi Art Foundation in Delhi, the following three episodes are now unfolding ; what was the public response and what reactions did the project generate?

Raq's: We've had an excellent response. It changed, from anticipation, when all that was visible were proposals and a design on space; to participation, when proposals began to be realized; to enthusiasm, when works began to trigger new resonances; to reflection and a sense of carrying things forward in a significant way. The episodes, which are days when the exhibition reconfigures itself, through the inhalation of new work, the exhalation of ideas that have been developing, and a sort of metabolic transfer of energies and concept, have been exhilarating.

The last episode, which invited fifteen women to reflect on their own practices was remarkable, it generated a kind of electric attentiveness. During the evening various events took place, including:

- A scientist talking about an epidemic of hysterectomies in the hinterland, intersecting choice, compulsion, labour, medical interventions and what happens to the female body as it gets processed as a productive machine.
- A film theorist developing her conjectures on the vocabulary of love.
- A poet articulating her rage against patriarchy with humour, skepticism and a terse love of language.
- A singer performing against the terms of her contractual obligations in the entertainment industry.
- A curator exploring the idea of artistic failure through the report of an email exchange with artists.

These are just some of the projects, there were many more and all of these practices were contextu-

alized within a space of artistic work, of practice itself. It ended up being a kind of breakthrough for the public, when the borders between different kinds of doing and being became permeable to all sorts of osmotic transfers.

G/C: Did the recent sad event – where a young woman regrettably died after being beaten and gang raped on a bus in Delhi – and the worldwide public outburst against this incident and violence against women, have any influences on *Sarai Reader 09*?

Raqs: No one has been untouched by the tragedy that struck the young woman. The whole city, especially a lot of young people, have been transformed by the way in which they have come out against misogyny on the streets. We are not removed from this situation, and in some ways, are in the thick of it in our personal capacities, as are some of the artists. An artist who works with performance and has been part of *Sarai Reader 09* has been developing silent performances that draw attention to the vulnerability of the body, but we are doing these things in the course of our daily lives, not especially, or solely in the context of the exhibition. There is a lot of writing and conversation happening; and as what often happens in a moment of transformation, strangers are talking to strangers. On the episode that opens on February 3rd 2013, we will feature a slide show of photographs of the protests by a young photographer who has been meticulously documenting every demonstration and protest.

G/C: The name of the exhibition derives from the publication “*Sarai Reader 09:(Projections)*”, that will take place concurrently. What are the converging points between the exhibition, *Sarai Reader 09* and the publication?

Raqs: We see this exhibition as an open book. By this we mean it has a very publication like form. It announces itself; it creates its own critical apparatus. And, it takes its inspiration from the eclectic adventurousness and rigor of the *Sarai Readers*. There will be an exhibition related publication, which will be the Ninth *Sarai Reader* and we are calling it “*Projections*”. This is not going to be a catalog of the show. Rather, it will be a kind of annotative device, that takes the concepts of the exhibition discursively further, but also works as a kind of exhibition in print and paper.

G/C: By sending out a call for proposals, for the exhibition and the publication of “*Sarai Reader 09*”,

you must have received many applications, how did the selection process develop and what criteria did you set?

Raqs: We have a curatorial colloquium, which expands beyond the three of us in Raqs to colleagues who have been working with us in *Sarai* for several years. We meet at regular intervals, discuss each proposal threadbare, explore its potentials, argue its merits and try and see how best we can position an idea. Naturally, not every proposal makes it, but those that do, go through a very thorough process, which helps us hone and sharpen the artists intention, and sometimes to raise the level of the conceptual ambition of the work.

G/C: So, is this shared authorship, or part of a wider curatorial collective?

Raqs: Perhaps it is something beyond authorship. We have a group of people – the wider curatorial colloquium – that has been thinking a set of questions about practice with us for a while. This exhibition is a way of marking milestones and cardinal points in that developing thought process. None of us claims that process as property. We, as Raqs, instigated this phenomenon, but now it finds its way into the world under a variety of influences, including our own. That is a more accurate way of looking at the situation of *Sarai Reader 09*.

G/C: As co-curators of *Manifesta 7, The Rest of Now*, in Trentino, Italy (2008) – and your ongoing project *Sarai*, how do you consider authorship in your curatorial practice?

Raqs: For us, Authorship is not something that collapses into bodies and biographies alone. A moment and a duration are also authors. A network can be an author. A desire and a dilemma can also author a work. We see authorship in terms of the things that make a work appear in the world. Only some of those things are people. Sometimes more than one people cause a work to appear. This can mean that authorship may be vested in each of these people as individuals, it can also mean that it is vested in the relationship that ties these individuals together. Curatorially, we seek to be open to all these nuances when we consider authorship. We are not impresarios, we are not directors, we are not managers. Perhaps the most interesting form our curatorial model of authorship takes is as something of a hybrid between catalyst, witness, agent and interlocutor.



Raq Media Collective are based in New Delhi, India and composed of three media practitioners: Jeebesh Bagchi (*1965), Monica Narula (*1969) and Shud-dhabrata Sengupta (*1968).

Raq Media Collective enjoys playing a plurality of roles, often appearing as artists, occasionally as curators, sometimes as philosophical agent provocateurs. They make contemporary art, have made films, curated exhibitions, edited books, staged events, collaborated with architects, computer programmers, writers and theatre directors and have founded processes that have left deep impacts on contemporary culture in India.¹

Raq Media Collective remains closely involved with the Sarai program at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (www.sarai.net), an initiative they co-founded in 2000. Sarai Reader 09 is an ongoing contemporary art exhibition (18 August 2012 – 16 April 2013) at the Devi Art Foundation, Gurgaon, India.

Captions

All figures: Courtesy of Raq Media Collective.
Sarai Reader 09 exhibition, Devi Art Foundation,
Gurgaon, India.

Artists and Curators as Authors – Competitors, Collaborators, or Team-workers?

Dorothee Richter

Are artists and curators competitors for authorship in the fine arts? Have curators adapted procedures of artistic self-organisation, and if so, with which consequences? Or are artists and curators collaborators in an area in which attributions are uncertain, and therefore also more flexible and negotiable?

This paper discusses artistic and curatorial authorship, and attempts to situate it within history. Are artists and curators competitors for authorship in the fine arts? Have curators adapted procedures of artistic self-organisation, and if so, with which consequences? Or are artists and curators collaborators in an area in which attributions are uncertain, and therefore also more flexible and negotiable? I will discuss these questions based on concrete historical examples:

1. A photography of Harald Szeemann at Documenta 5;
2. Case study: The Fluxus artists and their struggle for the power of definition;
3. Case study: The Curating Degree Zero Archive as an attempt to negotiate and hold in suspense the relationship between artists and curators.

I will follow in this paragraph an argument, that Beatrice von Bismarck has developed¹: the pose adopted by Harald Szeemann on the last day of Documenta 5 established the occupational image of the authorial curator as an autonomous and creative producer of culture, who organised exhibitions independently of institutions. For the first time ever in the history of Documenta, an individual curator single-handedly defined its theme, calling the central section of the exhibition "Individual Mythologies" (within the overall exhibition theme "Questioning Reality – Image Worlds Today"). Szeeman was solely responsible for the selection of artists, while previously artists had been chosen by a committee of art historians, politicians, and association chairmen. Szeeman was appointed "General Secretary of Documenta 5."² The image unmistakably reveals a specific arrangement of

power: a cast figure enthroned amid a group of persons is a highly traditional kind of image composition. In what follows, I will discuss three pictures selected from Dumont's Encyclopedia of Arts and Artists. Each of these depictions adheres to the basic pattern, since the restaging of this pose resonates with previous patterns of meaning. I will comment only briefly on the image composition of these works, ignoring other aspects³ because I will especially looking into the appeal character of images in the political sphere.



1 Spanish Antependium [alter substructure] with Christ in the Mandorla and with the Twelve Apostles, around 1120, Barcelona

The meaning of this image arises from its interaction with a divine service, in that it serves to instruct and situate the congregation. Its primary purpose is to depict Christ as a God who has become human. The rigid composition of the image and its schematic figures make it clear that a firmly established hierarchy exists, in which relations are entirely formal and impersonal. The arrangement of power is rigid.

The proportions of the figures clearly establish and substantiate an obvious hierarchy between divine creation and mortal humans. One figure stands at the centre of the picture. While the arrangement of figures and their proportions vest the central figure with power and authority, God is at the same time also human. The picture presents itself as a truth, hierarchically situating us as viewers standing in front of it and accepting instruction.



2 Duccio di Buoninsegna, Maestà, 1308–1311, tempera on poplar panel, 213 x 400 cm (Antependium= altar substructure)

Duccio's Maesta also fulfils a cultic function. Its composition implies worship and veneration, specifically the veneration shown towards a woman with a male, God-like child on her lap. The sheer size of the Mother of God removes her from the human mortals turning towards her and the child. She holds the child in her arms and lowers her gaze, whereas the baby Jesus looks with authority out of the picture into the world. Like the previous picture, Duccio's also hierarchically situates its viewers, who can to a certain extent identify themselves with the gesture and movement of the worshippers in the picture.



3 Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres,
The Apotheosis of Homer, 1827,
oil on canvas, 386 x 515 cm

The Greek poet Homer is the central figure in Ingres's *The Apotheosis of Homer* (1827). Clearly apparent in the painting is the attribution of an ingenious spirit bestowed upon the poet by divine powers. Inscribed in this arrangement, moreover, are additional concepts and effects of gender difference, which since the Renaissance have constructed the male subject as the subject of central perspective. The female muses sit at the poet's feet. The specific dynamics of composition are such that the painting radiates beyond its edges and involves us in the events shown. The figures in the foreground turn towards us, appealingly, and direct our attention to the poet in a kind of substitutional testimony. As viewers, we close the circle around the poet, albeit on a much lower level. We complete the painting as it were, whose composition is obviously meant to address and include us.



4 Baltasar Burkhard, Harald
Szeemann, portrayed on 8th October
1972, the last day of Documenta 5,
black-and-white photograph.

Seen thus, Harald Szeemann's pose is a distinctive positioning, based on historical schemata, especially of the curator as a god/king/man among artists. Comparable to earlier visual demonstrations of power, this picture also endeavours to position its viewers, plainly appealing to their attention. Viewers are thus positioned opposite a scenario in which the artists form a clearly lower-ranking group as the curator's adepts. Szeemann's casual and sprawling pose makes it clear that here is someone who can take liberties. As viewers, we occupy an even lower hierarchical position than the artists; we are situated as eyewitnesses of a spectacle, not as members of a bohemian community. Nevertheless, our role is to provide affirmation.

Beatrice von Bismarck has observed that Szeemann's curating of *When Attitudes Become Form*, an exhibition that he organised as director of the Kunsthalle

Bern in 1969, firmly established his position and recommended him to convene Documenta 5.⁴ In 1969, Szeemann voluntarily resigned as director of the Kunsthalle Bern to found his own agency. He called the agency “Agentur für geistige Gastarbeit im Dienste der Visualisierung eines möglichen Museums der Obsessionen” [*Agency for Spiritual Guest Work in the Service of Visualising a Possible Museum of Obsessions*]. He didn’t register the agency and according to Sören Grammel it had no legal status. Szeemann described the curator as a “custodian, sensitive art lover, writer of prefaces, librarian, manager, accountant, animator, conservator, financier, diplomat, and so forth.”⁵ He positioned the Museum of Obsessions as an ideal edifice, as a curatorial concept. Employing the notion of the museum as a fictional institution, Szeemann brought it close to the actually existing institution as part of the institution of art, implicitly positioning himself as a museum director. Such positioning at the same time distanced the Museum of Obsessions from actually existing art institutions. While Sören Grammel’s study of Szeemann’s authorial position argues that “agency” points to a division of authorship in the production process, I would like to suggest that the term by all means implies hierarchy, and thus largely revokes the notion of divided authorship. Agencies have executives who are granted the right to commercially exploit their products – agency profits, however, belong to executives, not to staff.

Szeemann’s demonstration of power did not unfold without conflict. How actually did the dispute between the artists and the exhibition curator happen? The following remarks were made by Robert Smithson, and Szeemann appropriated the quote insofar as Smithson’s article appeared in the exhibition catalogue for Documenta 5:

“Cultural confinement occurs when a curator thematically limits an art exhibition instead of asking the artists to set their own limits. One expects them to fit into fraudulent categories. Some artists imagine that they have this mechanism under control, while in reality it controls them. Thus, they support a cultural prisonhouse that escapes their control. The artists themselves are not restricted, but their production most certainly is. Like asylums and prisons, museums also have inpatient departments and cells, namely neutral spaces that are called ‘galleries’. In the gallery space a work of art loses its explosiveness and becomes a portable object cut off from the outside world [...] Could it be that certain art exhibitions have become metaphysical scrapyards? [...] The curators as wardens still depend upon the debris of metaphysical principles and structures because they know no better.”⁶

In retrospect, Szeemann commented self-confidently on his function as a warden, selector, and author: “Nevertheless, this was hitherto the most comprehensive attempt to turn a large exhibition as the result of many individual contributions into something like a worldview.” He formulated “Individual Mythologies” as a “spiritual space in which an individual sets those signs, signals, and symbols which for him mean the world.”⁷ Admittedly, Szeemann’s view focused entirely on himself as author, and he considered the exhibition to be an image of one single worldview. While Daniel Buren participated in Documenta 5 as an artist, his contribution to the exhibition catalogue criticised the absorbing gesture of Szeemann, the meta-artist:

“The exhibition is tending increasingly towards the exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art and no longer as an exhibition of works of art. Here it is the documenta team, under Harald Szeemann, that is exhibiting (the works) and presenting itself (to criticism). The works on display are spots of colour

– carefully selected – of that picture that each section (hall) has assembled as a whole. There is even an order prevailing in these colours, since they have been targeted and selected based on the concept of the hall (selection) in which they exhibit and present themselves. Even these sections (castrations), which are – carefully selected – spots of colour of the painting that the exhibition is working out as a whole and as a principle, become visible only if they surrender to the organiser's protection, he who unites art by equalising it in the box screen that he rigs up for it. He [the curator] assumes responsibility for the contradictions; it is he who veils them."⁸

Even though exhibitions had been deployed since the French Revolution as new overall contexts of signification, capable of ideologically representing the state, nation, or the bourgeoisie, the focus on a single curator organising an exhibition was new. Seen thus, the photograph of Szeemann marks a turning point in the discourse and becomes effective alongside the resonant meanings handed down over time. The curator became a meta-artist. Which position were artists chased from in the process?

Walter Grasskamp's history of Documenta might give us some idea in this respect. Documenta is a paradigm of the production of art history, because in discursive terms it represents the most powerful exhibition enterprise of the post-war period in the German-speaking world. By mounting this large exhibition, post-war Germany demonstrated its endeavour to overcome Nazi ideology, a nationalist conception of art, and the National Socialist aestheticising of politics. The Nazi regime's aestheticising of politics had occupied large parts of public representation and thus also of public consciousness.⁹ Seen thus, the early Documenta exhibitions were a means of, and evidence for, the re-education of the German people. Similar events occurred at the Venice Biennale: in 1958, Eberhard Hanfstaengel, the German commissioner, presented as national representation a retrospective of the work of Vassily Kandinsky at the German pavilion (a neo-classical pavilion previously converted by the Nazis). Grasskamp notes that the exhibition [he refers to the Venice Biennale] "signalled to an international audience the intention of the Federal Republic of Germany to adopt previously banished and persecuted modern art as state craft."¹⁰

The Heroes of an Exhibition: Artists as Citizens

Walter Grasskamp has pointed out that Documenta 1 placed artists centre stage. Besides the actual catalogue images, the catalogue for Documenta 1 featured an architecture section and "a highly odd image section containing 16 pages, which the table of contents referred to quite laconically as *images of the artists*. Among others, this section included images of Picasso, Braque, Leger, the Futurists, Max Beckmann, and other participants either at work in their studios or taking up a pose. No artwork shown at the inaugural Documenta can be more typical of the particular reception of art at the time as this slim collection of images, in which modern artists are explicitly presented as heroes. These hero images share an aura of seriousness and respectability."¹¹

The entrance hall was also framed with portraits of artists, whose faces welcomed exhibition visitors. The portraits seemed rather like images of politicians or bankers, thus presenting the artists as citizens, as men clothed in suits and ties. They personified the new heroes, who replaced military and dictatorial leaders. The portraits were hung almost at eye level, from which we can infer a visualising of egalitarian principles. The Documenta 2 catalogue lacks a concentrated glorifica-

tion of artists, as Grasskamp observes: "Instead, the portraits of the artists are interspersed in the catalogue section, and could hardly be more pathetic, in some cases even worse. Such portraits are completely missing from the Documenta 3 catalogue; as if one had sought to correct an embarrassing lapse, the works alone now stand for the name, and the same applies to the catalogue of the fourth Documenta."¹²

It should be stated, that instead showing the persecuted or murdered artists it was a kind of evasive gesture to show the now called classic modernism as an internationally accepted style.



5 Documenta 1, 1955

Documenta 5 however no longer features any serious bourgeois portraits, but instead a hierarchically structured group, which nevertheless amounts to a rather anarchic overall picture. The dispute between artists and exhibition makers seemed to have been settled for the time being. The curator was now not only the "warden," but above all the figure subsuming the exhibition under one single heading. He prescribed a certain reading of the works, the title became the most distinct version of a programme, and his name emerged as the discursive frame. Szeemann had thus wrested the naming strategy and labelling from the hands of artist groups and had successfully transferred the exhibition into the economic sphere. For visitors, the title "Individual Mythologies" blended with the individual works and thus predetermined meaning – with the works forming small parts of a mythological narrative. Where, however, did the anarchistic bohemianism seen in the photograph come from? Which artistic strategies were possibly (iconographically) adopted between 1955 and 1972, which new forms of organisation preceded this gain in power, and which new forms of a creative potential were tried out beforehand?

This poster announces the first Fluxus festival held in Wiesbaden in 1962, that is, 10 years before Szeemann's appointment in Kassel.



6 Poster, Wiesbaden Festival of New Music, 1962

FLUXUS – Artists as Organisers

The 1960s witnessed a growing number of artist groups, including Fluxus, Viennese Actionism, the Situationists, the Affichistes, the Destruction Art Group, the Art Workers' Coalition, the Guerilla Art Group, Nouveau Réalisme, the Letterists, the Happenings, and the Gutai group. Each movement developed under specific social and historical conditions.¹³

In the German-speaking world, especially Fluxus and the Viennese Actionists became well known, as well as the Happenings, which were, however, not strictly distinguished from the two other movements. The reformulations introduced by these revolutionary art movements imply an altered positioning of art towards politics, and of the private sphere towards the public. They exploded genre boundaries, questioned the author's function, and radically changed the production, distribution and reception of the fine arts. Artist groups organised their own opportunities for public appearances. Their scores were performed jointly and differently in each revival; they took charge of distribution, of publishing newsletters and newspapers, and of establishing houses and galleries. Audiences were now directly involved and subject to provocative address. The inversion of terms instituted by Fluxus, by mapping their methods of composing music onto all aspects of the visual, made it possible to consider everything as material and as a basis for composition.¹⁴ They challenged hitherto prevailing cultural hegemony and manifoldly anticipated on a symbolic level the 1968 student riots and protest movements.

Fluxus artists took up educated middle-class concepts in both their choice of venues (museums, universities, galleries, concert halls) and the terms employed in their events, such as score, composition, symphony or concert – only to subsequently subvert them. Silke Wenk has shown that in the postwar period the need of Federal Germans for a clearly structured order organised in terms of stable values, which found only partial expression in political discourse, was displaced onto high culture.¹⁵ Hierarchised high culture therefore appears as a refuge from the collapse of a collective nationalist identity at the end of the Hitler regime and the aggressions and sense of guilt bound up with this breakdown. Adorno, a contemporary of the Fluxus movement, concluded “that secretly, unconsciously, smouldering, and hence particularly powerful, those identifications and the collective Nazism [here nazi-ideology] were not destroyed at all but continue to exist. The defeat has been ratified within just as little as after 1918.”¹⁶ The destruction of the piano under the “misleading” headings “concert, New Music, score, etc.” shattered precisely this bastion of retreat to “timeless” hierarchised high culture. The Fluxus actions revealed a fissure in the imagined unassailability and sealing off of this cultural sphere. When gazing into this fissure, the contemporaries perceived an atmosphere of gloom: repressed sexuality, guilt and violence.

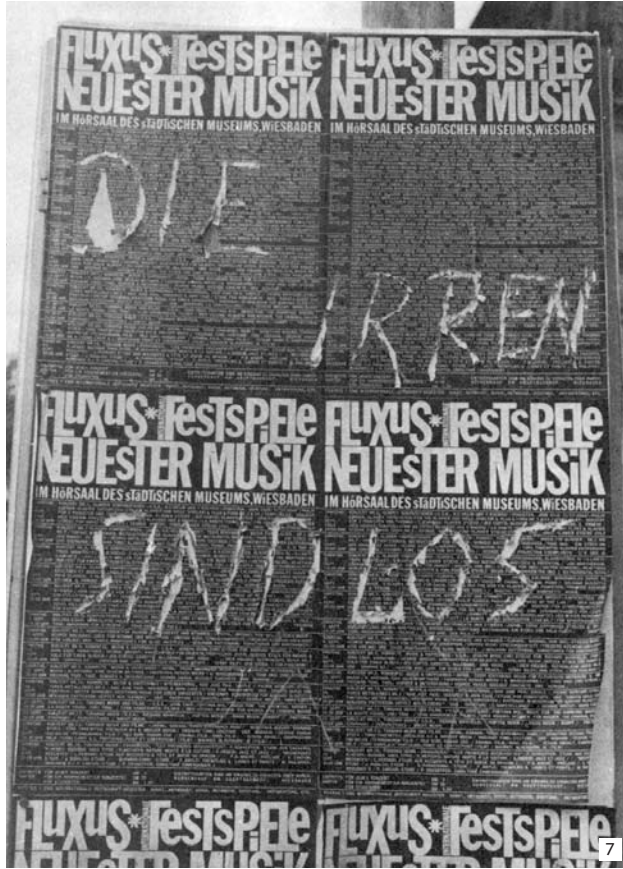
Already in 1965, Fluxus artists began publishing sarcastic articles that had previously appeared in the *Bildzeitung* (Germany’s major tabloid) and middle-class feuilletons, together with photographs of their performances and reports penned by the artists. Reprinting a *Bildzeitung* article, a paper known for its right-wing tendencies, in an Fluxus publication as it had situated the artists’ actions as left-wing and potentially revolutionary. The description of the audience in this article as “bearded young men, demonically looking teenagers, and elderly women” carries sexual connotations. Precisely those persons most likely to be of an age in which they would be living in a well-ordered sexual relationship, namely a middle-class marriage, are conspicuously absent from such a description. Even the “elderly women” appear to have come without elderly men. Each of the groups mentioned implies a certain sexual openness, not to mention availability. The suspicion of sexual debauchery, at least by way of allusion, underlies the description as a subtext. Press comments varied from mere boredom to derisive comments. Reprinting the articles in a documentation published by artists foregrounds the narrow-mindedness of the press and buttresses the mythologisation of Fluxus actions as those of a protest movement. Moreover, conducting a negative discourse on a work of art also produces meaning (and ultimately enhances its value), as the artists realised.¹⁷

Dick Higgins commented on one of the pieces performed on that particular weekend as follows:

“By working with butter and eggs for a while so as to make an inedible waste instead of an omelette. I felt that was what Wiesbaden needed.”¹⁸ The latter remark certainly applied to the entire performance. The festival also provoked comments from the Wiesbaden population in response to the re-education to which they were exposed: this poster was reprinted three years after the event as an instance of self-positioning in *Happenings, Fluxus, Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme* (eds. Becker and Vostell).¹⁹

As mentioned, the artists organised their own performance opportunities. A group of letters of George Maciunas, are especially interesting in this respect as are largely concerned with organisational details, but also have an ideological streak. Astonishingly, Becker and Vostell’s above-mentioned publication already blended a variety of different texts as early as 1965, displaying these without further ado in

the art context. Not only reports of the participating artists (predominantly male), but also details of the “making of an exhibition” were included. Disclosing organisational processes implies institutional critique. The conventional notion of a closed, presentable, image-like performance is subverted. “Backstage” affairs are laid bare, thereby dismantling the aura of a work and of the idea of the authentic, spontaneous, and ingenious artist-as-subject.



7 Poster, Wiesbaden Festival of New Music, Scribbles, 1962.
Comments of German public:
“the maniacs have broken loose”.

On 17th January 1963, George Maciunas wrote to Joseph Beuys before the latter became a member of the Fluxus movement:

“Dear Professor Beuys:

I received your letter yesterday evening, and herewith respond to your questions.

1. Coming to Düsseldorf already at 10am on 1 February would be somewhat uncomfortable as I would have to stay away from work and would lose 80 Marks. I could come on Friday evening towards 11pm. I must consider the same problem that Emmett Williams has. I will come on 1 February at 10am if it absolutely necessary. Actually Saturday would be enough to prepare things.

2. Our manifesto could for instance be a quote from an encyclopedia (enclosed) on the significance of Fluxus. I enclose a further manifesto.

3. We would be delighted if you could perform at the Festival. Wolf Vostell, Dieter Hülsmanns, and Frank Trowbridge will be also be taking part as performers and composers. I have revised the programme once more and have included your compositions, although I don't know which of Trowbridge's compositions can be performed. I would need to see them before I could agree [...]

establishing connections and recontextualisation, but also the authoritative gesture of inscriptions and exclusions. Also, his attempts to subsume as a meta-artist the works of other artists under a single label (“Fluxus”) recall the role of a contemporary curator. Just as in today’s independent scene, realising exhibitions and events depends not only on large venues and funds, but also other kinds of desire relations. Personal friendships, networks, group affiliations, and positionings within the field all account for the social capital that allows one to operate in the fine arts. This social network represents social and cultural capital, which can be translated into economic capital. Thus Maciunas’s role transgressed the established roles in the field of art, and anticipated new structures and modes of operation. While the Fluxus images indicate no hierarchical relations among the group of artists, the group is predominantly male. Szeemann’s staging, however, partly adopted and established a hierarchical relation between gestures and stances, suggesting an anarchic, liberated image of the artist, as yet another facet of the myth of the artist.

Subject to Negotiation: Curating Degree Zero Archive (CDZA) – an attempt to hold in suspense the relationship between artists and curators



10 CDZA Basel, January-February 2003.

In 2003, Barnaby Drabble and I initiated CDZA. Together with Annette Schindler, director of plug.in (Basel), we invited curators, artist-curators, and groups of curators from the area of “critical curatorial practice” to take part. CDZA is an archive on the one hand, and a touring exhibition and Web site linked to participant projects on the other. Elektrosmog, the Zurich-based design group, developed a display and navigation system, and Wolfgang Hockenjos designed the CDZA web-site. In the field of art, archives are practices found increasingly since the 1960s. Hitherto established chiefly by artists and collectors, most recently curators have begun to set up archives to provide access to their collections of material and make public their selection criteria. This results from the dissolution of a self-contained work of art, that is, the disappearance of a contingent art object, which necessitates another form of cultural memory and has always comprised a note of protest and a critique of museum practices. (Fluxus was also predominantly collected in archives, especially the Sohm Archive and the Silvermann Collection). Nevertheless, such archives and the collection and making public of materials tend towards a kind of self-empowerment, aimed at entering cultural memory and to become audible in what Foucault called the “murmur of discourse.”

Curating Degree Zero Archive strives towards an open narrative structure, corresponding to the diverse critical contents provided by the participating curators. Arrangement of contents is not unalterable. Instead, CDZA travelled from

institution to institution, thus altering and expanding the selection of positions presented in cooperation with the host institutions. We therefore worked closely on content and form with artists, designers, and curators. The basic idea of the archive is progressive and educational, and to gather information otherwise difficult to access into curatorial projects. Via its website, it aims to provide archive users with a navigation structure and to operate as a basis for scientific and applied “research” for both the participating curators and other arts and culture agents. It does not aim to establish a closed narrative, but through a non-uniform range of diverging positions to situate within a framework critical and politically intended curatorial work of individual curators and render discernible contexts. We consider the contradictions arising from the presentation of different practices to be fruitful. We aim to preserve the contradictions, fissures, and divisions and to use the resulting questions as a possibility for obtaining knowledge and insight.

Both Barnaby Drabble and I had until then worked chiefly as curators and authors, but following our commitment we now moved into the position of an artist. Our declared aim, moreover, was to share the power of defining the archive with others in various ways. Thus, the archive is reinterpreted and expanded at each location. We experienced the difficulty of assuming the role of artists towards the host curators when Annette Schindler proposed to display a worldmap indicating the various exhibition locations. I refuted this idea for various reasons, among others because it would cement a Eurocentric worldview and buttress the conception of the curator-as-author. A standard worldmap, as a pseudo-egalitarian sign of a television consumer society, would obstruct other views of topography and its national, cultural and geographical meanings. I was unable to assert this position. On the one hand, we programmatically agreed to outsource the power of definition, as described in our concept – while on the other, we found ourselves in a pre-structured, power-shaped institution, which granted us as “quasi-artists” less power than the curator.

From Basel, the archive subsequently travelled to Geneva, Linz, Bremen, Birmingham, Bristol, Lüneburg, Edinburgh, Berlin, Zürich, Milan, Seoul, Bergen, and Cork. In line with the title, small panel discussions involving the audience dealt with various issues, for instance how a critical practice could be defined, the relationship between artists and curators, how curating could be taught, and how the relationship with a wider public could be conceived. In order to make the archive productive, debating the archive with local audiences became our central concern.

The archive turned itself into a visual manifestation of a discourse about the displaying and mediating of contents. Modes of presentation ranged from funky displays over sculptural forms to discussion fora – which raises the key question how materials can be made accessible and curiosity aroused, how they can initiate debates and challenge traditional positions and also – on the other hand – the normative effects of displays. Presentations became a balancing act between promising pledges of interaction and amusement for post-Fordist subjects and a realised (not merely symbolic) possibility for debate. For us, the re-interpretation was as good as much possibilities it offered for the public to engage with the material.

Especially the re-reading of the archive proposed by Lise Nellesmann in Berlin provided an opening that made the contours of the groups “audience” and “actors” permeable. Lise Nellesmann invited participants, visitors, and artists and curators in transit to present their archive “favourites.” Over ten evenings, two or three participants would present their projects for joint discussion. This setting enlarged the group of those mastering the discourse; publications, DVDs, and videos housed in

the archive thus became the starting points for the exchange of knowledge and opinion-making. Users thus unfolded the archive's potential, employing it as a platform for their concerns; our power of definition as initiators and co-deciders on new admissions was also questioned.



11 Berlin, Sparwasser HQ, Lise Nellesmann invited artists, curators and theoreticians to present their favorites from the archive.

Within Sasa(44) & MeeNa Park's reinterpretation of the archive in Seoul in December 2006 and January 2007, the worldmap prepared by Peters, a Bremen-based scientist, and published by Alfredo Jaar, functioned as a visual node of the discourse. It ended up in the archive as part of the "Do All Oceans Have Walls" project curated by Eva Schmidt and Horst Griese. This worldmap was presented differently in that European countries were very small compared to their usual size. It allows us to see how multi-authorial discursive practices in art proceed, namely as a process involving resignification and various authors. Thus, the "worldmap" was re-performed – in a way a late answer to the first display of a worldmap in Basel. Its re-performance clearly revealed that "critique" and signifying processes can be linked and become a joint practice, resulting in an *Archive of Shared Interests*, as formulated by the De Geuzen artist group.



12 In Seoul the unusual but interesting worldmap was presented and Western hegemony questioned.

Artist and curators as cultural producers

Based on the material and arguments presented here so far, one preliminary finding is that artists and curators are involved in a power-shaped constellation. Only through shared content-related interests, political articulation, and joint positioning strategies can concerns be formulated that shift hierarchical arrangements into the background. Artists and curators become collaborators, as evidenced by numerous groups, whose protagonists come from different fields. Curators have quite clearly adapted the procedures of artistic self-organisation and transformed

these into hierarchical constructions. However, “artists” and “curators” are no longer functions that can be distinguished in each and every case. Both are involved as cultural producers in signifying processes. Some curators first considered themselves artists (for instance, Ute Meta Bauer and Roger M. Buergel), while in other cases artistic practice contains elements of curating (for instance, Ursula Biemann, Andreas Siekamn, Alice Creischer). Therefore, the term “cultural producers” make sense. Nevertheless, it is imperative that concrete situations are discussed in relation to how power evolves in their cases. This becomes even more necessary, since the nature of art as a commodity suggests an increasingly intense focus on an individual author, thereby misappropriating complex relations and signifying processes.

The possibility of positioning the audience as active participants either in front of a picture as a group receiving instruction or as eye-witnesses or as participants in the picture is fascinating. However, we should not let the matter rest with a promising gesture on the level of a funky display, that is, of participation as a spectacle. The course that power takes must be reversible and authorship must be many-voiced. For us, this meant making available and relinquishing the archive and its interpretation. The archive makes sense for us if it occasions and encourages discussion and processes of self-empowerment, that is, if positions tip over and remain negotiable.

Translated by Mark Kyburz

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Notes

1 Beatrice von BISMARCK: See Beatrice von BISMARCK, Curating, in *Dumonts Begrifflexikon zur zeitgenössischen Kunst*, ed. Hubertus BUTIN, Cologne 2002, pp.56–59.

2 See GRAMMEL, Sören: *Ausstellungsautorenschaft. Die Konstruktion der auktorialen Position des Kurators bei Harald Szeemann, Eine Mikroanalyse*. Frankfurt 2005.

3 I refer to Wolfgang Kemp’s reception aesthetic approach; see Wolfgang KEMP, ed., *Der Betrachter ist im Bild, Kunstwissenschaft und Rezeptionsästhetik*, Cologne 1985, and Wolfgang KEMP, Der rezeptionsästhetische Ansatz in: BRASSAT, KOHLE: *Methoden-Reader Kunstgeschichte, Texte zur Methodik und Geschichte der Kunstwissenschaft*, Cologne 2003, pp.107 ff.

4 See BISMARCK, as footnote 1.

5 Harald SZEEMANN, 1970, p. 26, quoted in Sören GRAMMEL, see footnote 2.

6 Robert SMITHSON, Kulturbeschränkung, Katalog der documenta 5, Kassel, 1972, quoted here in *Kunst/ Theorie im 20. Jahrhundert*, Hg. Harrison, Wood, Ostfildern Ruit, 2003 p. 1167.

7 Szeemann and Bachmann in Szeemann, quoted in Sören GRAMMEL, p.39, see footnote 2.

8 Daniel BUREN: Exposition d’une exposition, in: Documenta 5, 1972, quoted in Oskar BÄTSCHMANN, *Ausstellungskünstler, Kult und Karriere im modernen Kunstsystem*, Cologne 1997, p. 222.

9 Walter GRASSKAMP, *Der lange Marsch durch die Illusionen, Über Kunst und Politik*, Kapitel: Kunst der Nation, Munich 1995, pp. 131-153.

10 Ibid., p.140.

11 Walter GRASSKAMP, *Modell documenta oder wie wird Kunstgeschichte gemacht? Kunstforum International* Volume 49, 1982, (see Web research KI).

12 Ibid.

13 Justin Hoffmann, for instance, subsumes Fluxus, the Viennese Actionists, numerous individual artists, the Situationists, the Affichistes, the Destruction Art Group, the Art Workers' Coalition, and the Guerilla Art Group under the designation "Destruction Art," which has, however, failed to asserted itself as a term in art history. See Justin HOFMANN, *Destruktionskunst*, Munich 1995

14 See Diedrich DIEDERICHSEN, *Echos von Spielsounds in Headphones. Wie Kunst und Musik einander als Mangelwesen lieben. Texte zur Kunst*, Volume 60, Berlin December 2005.

15 See Silke WENK, *Pygmalions moderne Wahlverwandtschaften. Die Rekonstruktion des Schöpfer-Mythos im nachfaschistischen Deutschland*, in Ines LINDNER et al. (ed.) *Blick-Wechsel, Konstruktion von Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit in Kunst und Kunstgeschichte*, Berlin 1989 and Barbara SCHRÖDL: *Das Bild des Künstlers und seiner Frauen*, Marburg 2004.

16 Theodor W. ADORNO, *Gesammelte Schriften, Volume 7: Ästhetische Theorie*, 1970, p.135.

17 See also Pierre BOURDIEU, *Die Regeln der Kunst*, Frankfurt a. M. p. 276.

18 Owen F. SMITH, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*, San Diego 1998, p.74.

19 Jürgen BECKER and Wolf VOSTELL, *Happenings, Fluxus, Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme, eine Dokumentation*, Hamburg 1965.

20 George MACIUNAS in: Jürgen Becker and Wolf Vostell: *Happenings, Fluxus, Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme, eine Dokumentation*, Hamburg 1965, p. 197.

Dorothee Richter is head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating and co-founder, with Susanne Clausen, of the "Research Platform for Curatorial and Cross-disciplinary Cultural Studies, Practice-Based Doctoral Programme" a cooperation of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating and the Department of Fine Arts, University of Reading. From 1999 to the end of 2003, Richter was artistic director of the Künstlerhaus Bremen where she curated a discursive programme based on feminist issues, urban situations, power relation issues, institutional critique. In 2005 she initiated, in collaboration with Barnaby Drabble the Postgraduate Studies Programme in Curating. Symposia: "Re-Visions of the Display", coop. Jennifer Johns, Sigrid Schade, Migros Museum in Zurich. 2010 "Institution as Medium. Curating as Institutional Critique?" coop. with Rein Wolfs, in 2013 the symposium "How is afraid of the public?" at the ICA London, coop. with Elke Krasny, Silvia Simoncelli and the University of Reading. Her most recent publication is *Fluxus. Kunst gleich Leben? Mythen um Autorschaft, Produktion, Geschlecht und Gemeinschaft and the new Internet platform www.on-curating.org which presents current approaches to critical curatorial practice*. In 2013 she published a film together with Ronald Kolb: *Flux Us Now! Fluxus explored with a camera*.

Interview with curator Valerie Smith

by Jacqueline Falk and John Canciani

While studying for her PhD in Art History in the early 1980s, Valerie Smith curated for Artists Space, one of the leading institutions for contemporary art in the New York City. She stayed there until 1989 and soon after became the director of the international exhibition Sonsbeek 93 in Arnhem, Netherlands. Following Sonsbeek 93, she was chief curator and exhibition director at Queens Museum of Art in New York for eight years. At this time she was honoured with important awards. Her exhibition Joan Jonas, Five Works, (2003) received the International Association of Critics Award and for Down the Garden Path, The Artists' Garden After Modernism, (2004), the Emily Hall Tremaine Curatorial Award. Since April 2008 until the end of 2012 she was head of the department of Fine Arts, Film and Digital Media at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (HKW). With the series Labor Berlin she created since 2010 a much-noticed stage for international artists, who choose the city as a creative and experimental base for their work. Furthermore she is a writer, editor and publisher of numerous publications.

This Interview was held by Skype with Jacqueline Falk and John Canciani on 18th January, 2013.

Jaqueline Falk/John Canciani: Valerie, you were in your twenties when you curated for Artists Space in New York. Artists Space, founded in 1972, had a big impact on the art institutions in New York and later elsewhere. Did you realize how big your impact was and if yes, when was the moment of realisation?

Valerie Smith: I realized Artists Space had had an important history when Helene Weiner was the director, and I wanted to be a part of it, but I hadn't realized it would continue to be important for artists. I think you hope you make an impact, but you are not so conscious of it at the time. It was fun and about working with emerging artists. The criterion was to choose artists, who were not represented by a commercial gallery. This meant that one had to really go out into the field and look at a lot of young work. Some of it was quite tentative, meaning not fully formed because they were young and their work was in that nice experimental stage, which was exciting because it brought in a great spirit into the space.

In its early years Artists Space followed a format in which an artist picked another artist. Laurie Simmons, Robert Mapplethorpe, Nan Goldin and Elisabeth Murray, for example, all curated shows of other artists. We had group shows curated in this way and exhibitions, which followed themes that were important for that moment. Artists Space always had performances and regular talks, but they weren't so formalized and documented as they are today. We live in a more self-conscious time.

Irving Sandler, a founder of Artists Space initiated the "Artists Slide File" where emerging artists could bring their slides and a resume and any interested person could review that material and get in direct contact with them. Curators and critics came to look at work that came from all over New York City. The slide file provided another platform from which young artists could get shows outside of the Artists Space. In addition Artists Space curated an annual exhibition based on the work in the files and these exhibitions were always very exciting, because new talents popped up and a lot of curators, dealers and critics would come to the openings.

Towards the end of my tenure there I remember being very conscious of how to distinguish Artists Space from all other similar institutions, like White Columns or PS1, a line of thinking partially provoked by funding institutions. We were just trying to do edgy work, and although everybody could claim that for themselves, it became very clear that the art world was getting so big in NYC that it could definitely hold an Artists Space plus a White Columns, plus a PS1, plus any number of alternative spaces, it was just a matter finding your special angle.

The year I left we picked Nan Goldin to curate a show, *Witnesses Against our Vanishing*. What she did on the AIDS-issue became enormously controversial and our funding from the National Endowment was taken back because of what they deemed as explicit content. There were demonstrations; it became a huge issue. The positive outcome for the institution, because with these shows we all felt Artists Space had an effect on the political system.

JF/JC: After 8 years of curating at the Artists Space you were invited to be the director of *Sonsbeek 93*. You developed the concept of the 3 circles: the Sonsbeek park, the city and the surrounding flood lands of the city. This included 103 locations within the park, a constructed landscape, the city with its institutions and the surroundings of Arnhem. The places and the works were very heterogeneous with every work in its place. *Sonsbeek 93* had the reputation of being challenging. It seemed to us that the decision about the sites were very important and were made at an early stage. Did you visit Arnhem first, scouted the locations and defined them for yourself or was this done together with the artists?

VS: I had seen Saskia Bos' wonderfully romantic and timely project in 1986 and I knew a lot of the artists who she showed. I absolutely wanted to do something very different and the Stiftung Sonsbeek allowed me to do so. After my first experiences at Artists Space with producing site-specific works I knew that this way of working was what I wanted to do for *Sonsbeek 93*.

Documenta 9 was also taking place at around that time, but unlike *Documenta* I didn't feel the necessity to travel around the world. There wasn't enough time or money to do so therefore, I kept very much to New York, LA and Europe. I had to work quickly and I wanted to show a number of artists that were working in Europe, but were not Europeans. I think I could've developed that much more, had I

had more time. The criterion was that once I decided on an artist I would invite them to propose an idea. I would invite them to come and spend two weeks in Arnhem. I had a car and we would travel in and around the environs of Arnhem, so I got to know the city very well. I wanted the exhibition to be in the villa, in Sonsbeek Park, in the city and out in the flood lands that surround the Rheine. Every time I got in the car, we would go to certain places that I knew, but I would always find new spots and the suggestions of the artists would lead us to explore different areas.

It was an adventurous and experimental way of working and a hugely time consuming process. There were a few people whose work I really liked, who I knew did not work in a site-specific or process oriented way, like Mike Kelley for instance and Juan Muñoz. I went to Madrid to meet Juan and told him that I didn't want him to do a sculpture, which was a relief to him, because he didn't want to either. He had been creating these wonderful radio pieces with his brother-in-law Alberto Iglesias, a great composer, who, I later found out, works with the film director Pedro Almodóvar. Juan with Roberto developed a beautiful story based on a building in Arnhem that was destroyed during World War II. The piece for radio, *Building for Music*, had a narrative by Juan about a visionary architect and his concept of architecture with a magical composition by Alberto.

Mike Kelley's *The Uncanny* project took place because I went to visit Mike in his studio in Pasadena. There, I saw the beginnings of the Heidi project he was working on with Paul McCarthy. Also on the wall were the beginnings of another project, but when I asked him about it, he said that it was a project that he would like to do but no one would do it, meaning finance it for him. I knew instantly that that was the project I had to produce. I knew it would be an exhibition within an exhibition within the *Sonsbeek 93* exhibition, because he included his personal collections plus an assembled collection of work within the larger context of the assembled artists in the *Sonsbeek 93* exhibition. But there were also projects proposed by artists that I refused to realize, like the project partially inspired by Neo-Nazi actions in the neighbouring town of Nijmegen, which Maurizio Cattelan wanted to do.

JF/JC: Do you remember, why it couldn't be realized?



VS: There was a very active Neo-Nazi group in Holland. They had spray-painted graffiti on the graves in the Allied Military Cemetery near Nijmegen. It was in the papers and Catalan wanted to use them in some way. It would have been terribly detrimental to the whole *Sonsbeek 93* project and to the community had we gone ahead with it. We discussed it among my colleagues and then I think I wrote him a letter to tell him I couldn't do it. I think he understood, but it was disappointing for all concerned that I couldn't accept any of his projects. And there were a number of other proposals that, for various reasons of finance, feasibility or mismatch, I did not realize.

JF/JC: You had 48 artists involved in *Sonsbeek 93*. How many artists did you contact or wanted to invite? Did any of the artists decline your invitation?

VS: I never had a limit on it, there came a point where... I think it's like a work of art, you know it's finished and then that's it. I invited more people than those who actually did a project. At one point it felt that it was full enough. And there is also a point where you've spent all the money.

There were artists who declined. Christian Philipp Müller was involved in the *Unité* project in

France. He considered *Sonsbeek 93* and was very nice, but in the end, suggested Tom Burr instead. Tom Burr is a wonderful American artist, who works site-specifically and I got to know his work and I liked it. Tom did an interesting project that involved Robert Smithson's writings on Frederick Law Olmstead and the gay community in Arnhem, which brought a strong social element to *Sonsbeek 93* that I sought to include and which Arnhem needed.

JF/JC: You decided that you wanted to make *Sonsbeek 93* like a research project, it seems you were interested in the approach, the curatorial methodology and the process. Did you have a reference point from other exhibitions you knew or was this a new experimental approach?

VS: Claire Bishop interviewed me regarding my models for *Sonsbeek 93*. She asked me specifically if I knew the work of Harald Szeemann, but I did not at the time I made *Sonsbeek 93*. I had never studied his exhibitions; coming from New York and steeped in the young art world there, he was absolutely not in my sphere of reference. I was most excited by the possibilities of the new productions I had done at *Artists Space* as I told you. Any possible outside influence would have been Kaspar König's 1987 *Münster Skulptur Projekt*. Some of the sculptural works were more involved than simply placed in the park. He invited several artists who stretched the concept of sculpture a little bit further by working with the social fabric of the place. It ended up being a sculpture or maybe something else. Some artists, like Michael Asher, developed a process where the aspect of sculpture changed over time; it wasn't just a single element in a site.

JF/JC: *Sonsbeek 93* was called a social art exhibition. You said that labels are a very easy way for people to deal with complex problems. Was the labelling an advantage for you or did you have to use a lot of energy to explain that some works were social art but not the whole project?

VS: I think these labels came well after the exhibition was over. During the preparation for *Sonsbeek 93* there was a feeling from the Communications department and the Trustees that the message of the exhibition wasn't coming across. In retrospect, this may seem surprising, because, of course, everybody is working in this way now but, at the time, I think it was a hard exhibition for people to swallow. Therefore, a program of talks was organized where I could go to a number of small city in Hol-

land and some cities in neighbouring countries to present the exhibition. I did a slide show and this was quite successful for the people who attended those talks. They became interested and there was a lot of enthusiasm, but often it was a small audience. *Sonsbeek* is not *Documenta*, where there is anticipation and everybody is anxious to hear what you have to say. But, I actually enjoyed the talks, because when you are discussing the work the complexity of it comes out, and you find more and more in the work to talk about. I think that's true for every subject, so this became an interesting part of the process, maybe more interesting for me than for the audience. I don't know if it had an impact on getting more people to see the show.

JF/JC: *Sonsbeek 93* was planned as a discourse of contemporary art between the art, the artists and society. Did that function, especially with the public from Arnhem?

VS: You know that's a hard one to answer, because there are several levels to this. When I first arrived, the people of Arnhem wanted me to learn Dutch; there was no time to do this. But, because I didn't know Dutch I couldn't read the papers, so I didn't know what the press had written about *Sonsbeek 93*. I did find out, through my Dutch colleagues, that the press was very critical and negative. But I was, for the most part, oblivious to this and wouldn't allow myself to focus on it. I have to say that many of the pieces were really brilliant. The artists had come up with great projects; it was just beautiful and very moving for me to see. If the public couldn't see that through the difficulties of getting there or the weather or the demands of the distances between works or whatever they were complaining about, then it's their loss. During the exhibition I had a horrible conversation with the designer of the catalogue, who told me that he thought the book was better than the exhibition (he had not seen the entire exhibition at the time). The book is all about the process, which was my idea, so I don't know how he could have concluded in such a way. I know that with these big exhibitions, like anybody's *Documenta* or *biennale*, you have certain pieces that are wonderful and brilliant, which become key pieces, and others, for various explainable reasons, are maybe not as good. With these big shows you can never win a 100%, it's just the way it is.

JF/JC: How do you handle the situation when you have the feeling that the work of an artist is not going to be as strong?

VS: In *Sonsbeek 93*, for instance, there were a few pieces for which there comes a point of no return. So you have to kind go with it. If you are not so busy and distracted that you can feel in the beginning that it's really not working, then you can make the hard and terrible choice of saying so and stop production. But if you don't catch it early, and, because of the way the process is going, you don't see what the result will be, you wait and give the artist time. At some point it becomes too late. So if it's not too detrimental to the artist, then I don't really care about myself, I let it pass and put the emphasis on the better work. It's an experiment. Not every work can be perfect. Everyone hopefully learns from it, so it is all right.

Sometimes when you deal with a number of very young artists who are not seasoned, this can happen; on the other hand, it is just as likely to happen with older experienced artists, too. Maybe it is the fault of the curator for inviting them in the first place and for allowing them to make those experiences. I don't regret these moments, I think it's just part of the process when you work with new productions, there is a risk, and when it fails there is always something positive to gain from it, there's always a reason. It can have to do with the lack of money, or the artist didn't spend enough time thinking it through, or the site was not a good match, or I wasn't there to help them, or the relationship and understanding wasn't strong enough between us or some artists are too shy to ask for attention. If you're working with 40 or more artists some get more attention than others. So there are all these variables, but in the end you must be philosophical about it. Or, work more closely with a smaller group of artists.

JF/JC: How would you describe your approach to curating?

VS: I like to work directly with artists and develop new projects for a particular space. It's always been a way of working that I have enjoyed, especially when I have a good team, and, given the opportunity, I think most artists enjoy it too. It is not so often that artists are offered the time and money to develop new work. There are challenges involved with working in this way, often due to time constraints, as well as financial and spatial/logistic considerations. At the same time, there is nothing more rewarding than researching a little known or forgotten subject in depth and presenting your findings in book or exhibition form. It's like uncovering a mystery and sharing it.

JF/JC: Do you visit a lot of exhibitions to inspire yourself and become familiar with new curatorial practices?

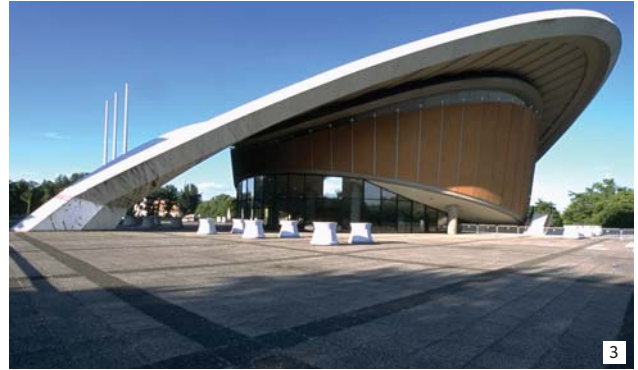
VS: Is there such a thing as a new curatorial practice? Currently academia is flooded with curatorial study programs, there are new ones sprouting up every week, according to e-flux advertisements. Clearly there is a demand and universities and academies are anxious to fulfil this trend as well as their coffers at a time when many institutions are in crisis. The crisis is the failure to properly educate students. Studies of this kind should be folded into the study of art history, rather than kept separate in order to create a track that takes more administration and money. The self-importance of some of these programs is annoying. But, then perhaps I am old school.

It is also a bit of a fallacy that people who work full-time for art institutions have time to see exhibitions. They largely steal the time to do so while sacrificing something or someone on the other end. But, this is particular to those of us who have family responsibilities on top of institutional pressures. No one likes to hear about it, no one talks about it; it is just a bad pill you reluctantly swallow. That said the best-stolen moments visiting exhibitions I have had are with artists, who are the most critical and also a lot of fun to discuss art with. However, mainly my inspirations come from outside contemporary art.

JF/JC: In the exhibition *Between Walls and Windows, Architektur und Ideologie* (2012) you reduced the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin to its original condition as the former Kongresshalle, a Berlin symbol of the Cold War. You removed the new cashier at the entrance, cut the artificial lights and new signage, and even opened every access from all four sides of the building. With this action you made this very iconic building into a sculpture, recovering the purity it had just after it was built. It's quite clear that you acted in this case as an artist yourself by creating this sculpture. Was it the first time for you to interfere in this way?

VS: I do not think this was an artistic act, but a necessary gesture of honesty to prepare the context of the exhibition's argument for the artists and architects who participated. It made the exhibition credible, without it the exhibition would have failed or been a lot less strong. Yes, I believe it was the first time I consciously set the stage for an exhibition in such an extreme way. Most spaces I've worked in

have been more or less "exhibition ready" they haven't needed or called for such a radical intervention on my part; I usually leave this to the artist or architect. While the concept of complete "disclosure" of the former Kongresshalle was very much in place at the beginning of the exhibition process, several key artist's and architect's projects in *Between Walls and Windows* underscored our commitment to it.



I've always been interested in architecture and have worked with architects since Artists Space, so for this last exhibition at HKW I developed the project that seemed appropriate to what this institution stood for, inside and out. It became very clear that the architectural and artistic interventions had to be on the periphery of the building so that the centre could reveal the ideological construction of the program. You walked into the centre to orient yourself and then had to find the work, a little bit like *Sonsbeek 93*. The interior had been bastardised through the different agendas of successive administrations; there was a lot of visual garbage obfuscating interior perspectives: flyers, cards, signage, furniture, etc. We just cleaned it out and convinced dissenting voices that the building needed to return to its original condition as close as possible. We turned off all the lights, opened all the doors, and made it open and free to the public for one month.

Before one couldn't properly see the building's interior, which is as symbolic as its exterior. There is one point during the day where the light would come in from the fenestration above and shoot right down into the *Unterfoyer*, lighting up the underground level. You could see very clearly how the light started to play into the building, which is the whole purpose of this idea of transparency. In this way the "open and free" ideology of the building became clear from the inside, not just the outside that everybody knows. The exhibition would not have worked if we hadn't orchestrated this; and, it was thanks to key members of the team, who argued hard for certain changes, that we were able to accomplish this.

It must be said that the Haus, like many art institutions, hosts many different events. They often rent parts of the building to outside organizations, which means there are no dedicated spaces just for art. One has to book well in advance, and even then one is subject to changes, often changes one has to pay out of the exhibition budget. Since *Between Walls and Windows* took over the entire building we negotiated to get one solid month without severe interruptions. One month is not enough time for most people to see an exhibition. Nevertheless, it is documented and was an important milestone for me and for many of us who worked on it.

JF/JC: What do you think are the differences between artists and curators? Do they share the same theoretical background?

VS: Essentially, they are two very different species; sometimes I get the impression they are at opposite ends. The spectrum of skills required for each profession can be very broad and vary greatly depending on the context. But, this does not mean that they cannot share the same theoretical background or have a successful practice in both fields; there are many historical examples of this. One learns something when curators and artists take on each other's roles. That said I have generally found artist curated exhibitions more interesting than when a curator as a curator intervenes or interferes, as the case maybe, "artistically" with an artist's work. This can be awkward and disastrous. When artists curate it is usually to contextualize their own work within a set of issues. There, I am a bit more forgiving, because even if it is not successful, it is usually amusing. My philosophy has been that the artist has primacy in the relationship. I like to give artists every opportunity to realize their vision exactly as they want it, of course, within financial and logistical

reason. I want artists to be as ambitious as possible, while I take on the role of facilitator, otherwise why do it? Naturally, this changes when working with dead artists and historical material. In both cases, a curator's work should be seamless, perfectly integrating all elements to the point.

Captions

- 1 Valerie Smith with Irene Hohenbüchler © Sonsbeek 93, Arnhem
- 2 Mike Kelley with Heidi statues © Sonsbeek 93, Arnhem
- 3 HKW side view © Affolter / Eugster
- 4 Opening, 01.09.2012 © Affolter / Eugster

Valerie Smith is a freelance curator and writer based in Berlin. As the former Head of Visual Arts, Film and Digital Media at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, she commissioned new work by architects and artists among them, *Between Walls and Windows. Architektur und Ideologie*, (2012) with Amateur Architecture Studio, Supersudaca, Markus Miessen, Ângela Ferreira, Inigo Mangano-Ovalle; *Über Wut* (2010) with Klara Lidén, Mike Rakowitz, Jimmie Durham; and *Rational/Irrational* (2008) including Javier Tellez, Artur "Bispo" di Rosario, Hanna Darboven. At HKW she also initiated the project room, Labor Berlin, for Berlin-based-foreign-born international artists. As Senior Curator and Exhibition Director of the Queens Museum of Art she curated many exhibitions among them award winners, Joan Jonas, *Five Works* (2003) and *Down the Garden Path, The Artists' Garden After Modernism* (2004). As Director of Sonsbeek 93 in Arnhem, NL she commissioned 42 new artists' projects among them Mike Kelley's *The Uncanny*.

Artist-curator Gavin Wade on authorship, curating at Eastside Projects and the post-industrial city interviewed by Michael Birchall and Nkule Mabaso

Michael Birchall/Nkule Mabaso: This issue of *On Curating* discusses the role of authorship in the practice of artists and curators. I'd like to start by talking about the merging of the role of the artist and curator, which you first outlines in a text, *Artist + Curator* = (2000). Here you identified a selection of artists who were committed to expanding their practice into the realm of curatorship in parallel with their tendency to act as artists. Would you agree with Paul O'Neil's statement that exhibitions by artists-curators (such as yourself) are now a distinctive model of curating?¹

Gavin Wade: I wrote a text last year called 'The 5 Acts of Art'² where I propose that art is exhibition, that art is not exhibited but that art exhibits, that exhibition is a fundamental function of being human, and the fundamental process of art. The artist-curator position builds on this 'truth' to produce art that is necessary. I agree there are a number of distinctive approaches to this now and that the artist-curator models have impacted on all other exhibition making to precipitate an awareness that art exhibits. But it is not the dominant form of exhibition still, and the belief that art is exhibited persists to much dullness! The artist is a primary producer of art. The curator is a secondary producer.

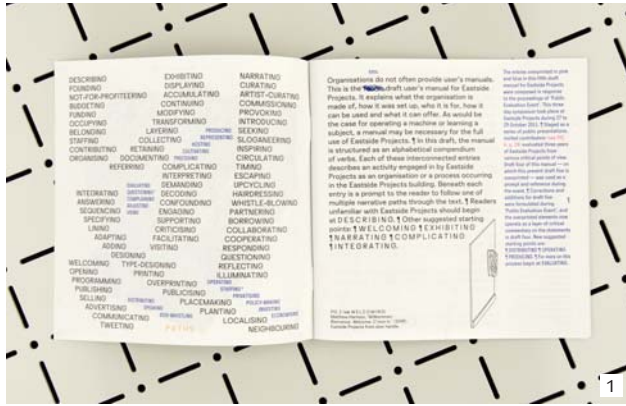
MB/MN: In 2008 you founded Eastside Projects in Birmingham in collaboration with artists Ruth Claxton, Simon and Tom Boor, designer James Langdon and architect Celine Condorelli. Eastside was conceived as an "artist run space as public gallery and

incubator of ideas and forms". How has Eastside evolved since it was initially founded? Could it be said that Eastside is a collaborative-curatorial platform as there is a team of co-collaborators?

GW: In language terms it has developed from 'an artist run space as public gallery and incubator of ideas and forms' to 'an exhibition space with many differences' via being 'an artist-run space, a public gallery for the city of Birmingham and the world', and 'a place formed through cumulative processes of collaboration — the coming together of many people's ideas to form the unique conditions of the gallery'. As Eastside Projects evolves and develops the way we describe ourselves develops also. To say otherwise how it has evolved will always be to do this same descriptive simplification of what the space and organisation is.

We believe it is urgent to provide a space that responds to today's most vital artistic practices. If the art of today is complex and challenging then the places that we conceive for experiencing it should be equally so. So it is really the gallery and what happens here and is distributed from the gallery that is the answer to your question 'how has it developed?' To tackle this question we produced a Draft Manual to 'explain' how to use Eastside Projects and we continue to do so. The manual is a way of questioning the idea of interpretation as much as the use of art. Each definition could have a more detailed definition so the 'what' of Eastside Projects would be further defined as 'a free, public space that is being

imagined and organised by artists. We commission and present experimental contemporary art exhibitions, and propose ways in which art may be useful to society. EP is a questioning structure that in turn produces more questions and also, of course, possible answers. Our ambition is to incorporate the methodologies of art-making at all scales and functions of the organisation.'



This is from our 5th Draft Manual, and we are working on our 6th at the moment. The new version is a children's book

At the start we borrowed from the Peter Nadin gallery's 1979 statement and said "We have joined together to execute functional constructions and to alter or refurbish existing structures as a means of surviving in a capitalist society.' I think this statement still stands. We don't call ourselves a 'collaborative curatorial platform' but it may apply. There are many, many aspects of collaboration and that is a key ethos of the organisation, to be open to the potential of collaboration and to allow that to be expressed not hidden. I like the phrase 'we have joined together' to do things. We join in many ways. I lead the production of Eastside Projects and collaborate with all the others and there are times when collaborations occur between others and not me, but not as often, although we would like that to happen more! The gallery has moments of focus where it is an artwork. My ambition is that the gallery is an artwork, not a curatorial platform. Artwork is the primary goal.

MB/MN: Following on from the previous question, in this collaborative model you have established, how are your fellow collaborators part of the curatorial decisions?

GW: The first exhibition, *This is the Gallery and the Gallery is Many Things*, set up an idea of an evolving space, as development and evolution as a

function of art. This has developed into a series of exhibitions that examine the functions of art, and the construction of a gallery or a public sphere through these functions. These have been *Sculpture Show* and *Abstract Cabinet Show* in 2009, *Curtain Show* and *Book Show* in 2010, *Narrative Show* in 2011, *Painting Show* in 2012, and *Puppet Show* in 2013 with *Trade Show* later this year. A number of these are curated with the other directors Celine Condorelli for *Curtain Show*, Ruth Claxton for *Sculpture Show* and James Langdon for *Book Show*. Celine and Tom Bloor curated *Puppet Show* with me supporting that process, then *Painting Show* and *Trade Show* are co-curated with other artists, Sophie von Hellerman for *Painting Show* and Kathrin Böhm for *Trade Show*. As well as this Ruth Claxton works closely with me on the overall programme as Associate Director, and co-curating Caroline Achaintre, Sara Barker, Alice Channer last year for example. Then the Second Gallery programme works with a wide range of people inputting from the other Directors to Elinor Morgan who is ESP Programmer at the gallery to other artist groups such as Kunstverein Schwerte or Form/Content.

We try to learn from processes and be open to ways of working and allow space for other groups and models to affect what we are, to alter us a public sphere.

MB/MN: Many artist-curators, curators and artists began their careers in artist run spaces; initially these spaces were established as an alternative to museums and galleries. In recent years Project Spaces have become part of the established art system and have been incorporated into large-scale exhibitions and biennials. How do you maintain an artist-run-centre model, without become a "mainstream" institution?

GW: The artist-run space is not a stop-gap. This was the first sentence I wrote in the very first text as I started the manifesto for Eastside Projects. I want the artist-run space to become the main thing. I don't really have any fear of that. I wanted to ask why isn't the artist-run space a career, an ambition. I think it should be. Not a stage in becoming an artist as it has been historically. There are many good things about how the artist-run space has existed but I saw this idea that it was a stop-gap as a weakness if they all do that. I wanted to make one that wasn't a stop-gap! But I doubt if it would become 'mainstream' as that would require that in the main people would want to engage a questioning, complex, and,

likely, difficult situation to experience art. But then, as you say, biennials can be pretty complex, difficult beasts when they get it right! I see absorption of our principles into other situations as a success and we respond accordingly.

MB/MN: How has your practice as an artist-curator developed since you began working at Eastside?

GW: Perhaps it has further contemplated, utilised and incorporated aspects of being a leader, a politician, and a manager. Eastside Projects allowed me to focus on series, iterative and cumulative processes in even more powerful ways I hope, than I was able to do as a roving artist-curator previous to 2008. It has also allowed a situation where all of the skills, approaches, networks and intuitive impulses that I have as an artist-curator could be supported in a more sustained way to allow an on going research visible to others in the field. It limits the number of other projects in other contexts that I am able to do, but then that was the point, to create new conditions, to create context, a new universe of a kind. I feel Eastside Projects continues to be the most ambitious project of my career. It is a dream project.

MB/MN: Within your practice, as an artist-curator, you use a specific methodology in the exhibitions you curate. During this process, how do you – as an artist-curator – maintain a clear authorial voice? Perhaps you could talk about the recent Mike Nelson exhibition in relation to this question.

GW: I'm ok with not maintaining a clear authorial voice but being affected by others voices. In fact I'm more than ok with it, I desire it. For *Puppet Show* I feel completely affected by the voices of Heather & Ivan Morison and Celine and Tom's thoughts on what the role of the puppet is. It's quite liberating to speak from another point of view, to use another voice. Collaboration allows that, encourages that. Working with Mike Nelson is a conscious choice to work with an artist not known to collaborate but who deals with context in very sophisticated ways. With Nelson's M6 made for Eastside Projects, curated by me, you experience an artwork by Mike Nelson where he alters and incorporates Eastside Projects into his artwork. Nelson decided to take away many of the long term artworks in the space and in effect replace them with a large twelve metre by twelve metre shot blasted concrete plinth ten centimetres tall and weighing thirty six tonnes! Nelson's alteration to our space becomes our reality and

Puppet Show sits on Nelson's stage now. M6 was in no way a work by me. It was not necessary for it to be. My choice as an artist-curator has been over the past 17 years to work in many different ways with many different people in many different contexts but I hope within the pragmatic utopian direction and impulses I take there is a consistency of attack and production of what art can be. Clarity of authorial voice is probably not the mission. I would suggest that clear authorial distinction is a red herring set up by the art world institutions of the past of which artists were of course implicit. I think those distinctions can be dismantled now.



MB/MN: It is my understanding that elements from previous installation(s) – or ephemera – are left behind for the next artist to work with. Could you perhaps elaborate on how this functions; are all the artists you invite satisfied with traces from previous artists? How is this part of your practice as an artist?

GW: We were immediately interested in the gallery as a cumulative environment, a space to be constructed over time; we weren't going to make something that would just be ready to go and stay that way forever. Our alteration to the space could only be the beginning, getting the right trajectory going. As Peter Nadin said 'Walls don't stay as walls, things happen to them, things are put on them. So why not let the thing evolve, let it continue, and see what happens?'³ In most galleries so much importance is put on creating a hallowed space for the next exhibition, making a force field of protection around the gallery that distinguishes it from the rest of the world. It's a funny thing to change a space only to make a protected environment for the next person to come along—it seems incredibly perverse and I realised if you do that continuously, you just get gallery fatigue, you begin to understand too much what that gallery is made of and the place no longer

has any meaning. The question for us was whether there is also a fatigue of endless possibilities, of change and transformation. El Lissitzky speaks of an equilibrium that you might try to achieve in exhibition making, and the idea of the long term artworks in the gallery is a questioning of this notion of an equilibrium of art, a flux of forces that are all related.

I suppose the space also acts as a growing archive of its own production and evolution. There was an interesting point for me in *Curtain Show* and the installing of Tacita Dean's work, *Darmstadter Werkblock*, when her assistant could not understand why the wall was the way it was. The wall was constructed of fragments of Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan's artwork — *Does your contemplation of the situation fuck with the flow of circulation*, and DJ Simpson's wallpaper work — *Disc 001 Real Grey* from *Abstract Cabinet Show*, and it was difficult to explain how while being the remainder of an artwork, it was also part of the gallery and the existing conditions that we wanted Tacita's film to work within. Once it was clear that there was a congruent relationship between the space and the subject matter in Tacita's own film of the relationship between Joseph Beuys's work and the space it existed within, he was happy with it, and didn't even want to paint over other areas we thought could be fixed up! People seem to need to create a difference between what is considered artwork and what is not, as if the gallery context itself was not work and could be ignored. As if something like our gallery office, *Pleasure Island by Heather & Ivan Morison*, was something you could ignore, while of course it is in every single one of our exhibitions. It is difficult to explain until people come to Eastside Projects; the space just makes sense when you are part of it. Perhaps this is because it is so far from a white cube, and all the layers of the making of the space are apparent and overlaid, making it too complex to read from a distance.

Every artist has a different response and sometimes they remove things, respond, adapt, add to, demand or just accept. It is a negotiation and some of those negotiations become artworks, some don't. Some bits of the building become sites where art exhibits new properties some don't.

MB/MN: In 2012 you were invited to be part of "City States", as part of the Liverpool Biennial. This particular part of the programme took place in a former Royal Mail sorting office and featured several cities, including Wellington, Lisbon, Oslo and Hong

Kong. As you were invited to represent Birmingham – in relation to the theme of hospitality – how did you select work to best exemplify this broad theme?



GW: I was personally invited by Sally Tallant (Director of the Liverpool Biennial) to produce a Birmingham section of City States but very late on in the process of the Biennial coming together. I wasn't asked to represent Birmingham, I took it on myself and with my fellow cultural leaders in Birmingham to do that. We do want to represent the city and to hopefully transform the city through those representations. Saying that, this was a fairly simple set up with no resources from the Biennial to make anything happen content wise. I put the idea to the We Are Eastside consortium that we are part of, we were part of establishing it in 2008, and the group decided this was a good situation to present something and to work together. The group consisted of Eastside Projects, Ikon Gallery, Grand Union, Capsule, Fierce Festival and Flat Pack Festival. It's a dynamic grouping of focussed people from very different types of organisations, and we all participated in a Cultural Leadership Programme together in 2010-11. I coordinated the project and each organisation contributed and selected a work by an artist they had worked with for the overall project. The title, *The Magic City*, came from an artwork by BAZ an artist collective here in Birmingham where they are proposing to remake a large sign from Birmingham Alabama that welcomes people to the city with the words, BIRMINGHAM THE MAGIC CITY.

We included a work by David Rowan, an artist who had had won the ESP commission for the Second Gallery earlier in the year and had made a very strong film work, filming underground in the Digbeth area where the gallery is based. ESP (Extra Special People) is our associate members programme and so the chance to present a work by a Birming-

ham artist that we had already invested in made a lot of sense. The variety of works was strong with a collection of Grind Core fanzine material presented by Capsule attracting a lot of attention. In a way it was a light project, done in quite a fun way but each organisations ethos and function could be seen through the works included. It was also a quick attempt to pull together some energy to show how we could do so much more given time and resources and generated some very useful conversations city wide for how the city should be prepared to take advantage of the networks that we have available to us. In this case the city couldn't respond to fund such an opportunity given the timeframe but others were, Birmingham City University, Visit Birmingham and others were able to contribute small amounts to support the project and each organisation chipped in a small amount. The publication part was useful to have. The exhibition part was quite compromised and basically based on turning up and making the best of the situation. But there was a good spirit and a very nice invitation from the Biennial team.

In terms of the theme we *exemplified* it through our collaboration as a cultural consortium but apart from that I don't think we responded to the theme at all. It didn't really seem to be the point! In many ways it was more politics than art production but I think that was pretty clear really and we used humour to make that point.

MB/MN: Both Liverpool and Birmingham were once heavily industrialised, this led to their economic successes. Since the 1990s biennials have appeared across the world in post-industrial cities, taking advantage of the range of empty warehouses and factories to display contemporary art. As a cultural producer how do you consider the implications for curating exhibitions in these post-industrial contexts?

GW: Currently James Langdon and I are working on the new Draft Users Manual and James had been developing an idea to change the coat of arms and motto of Birmingham City. It appears to be quite unknown, weirdly, that on the coat of arms of Birmingham there are two figures, called supporters, one is an engineer and one is an artist. I think this is really quite significant. My city has an artist on its coat of arms. Maybe a lot of coats of arms have artists on but I never knew that before James proposed it. James has proposed, in relation to what we do as Eastside Projects and how we are useful to the city, that the motto of Birmingham is updated from FORWARD to LAYERED. The idea of layering and not

removing what has come before completely but instead building on what was there before, upcycling, rethinking, adapting and working within and around is essential here in Birmingham as the previous idea of FORWARD has failed to produce the right conditions for a successful city. We think that LAYERED will provide the way for the city to be successful now and this idea of LAYERED makes sense so much for post-industrial contexts. We must build on the conditions that are there and make new conditions out of them, engineer and artist hand in hand. Our next goals are to develop this layering on a larger scale perhaps, to prove how art can work beyond post-industrialised regeneration, to develop Eastside Projects further and continue to produce art in a way that makes the city work better.

Notes

1 O'Neil, P. (2012) *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, pg. 105

2 To be published in the forthcoming, Gavin Wade, *UPCYCLE THIS BOOK*, 2013, Sternberg.

3 Céline Condorelli and Peter Nadin, conversation at Nadin's home in Lower Manhattan, July 12, 2009.

Caption

1 Eastside Projects User's Manual Draft 5, Page 1, edited by James Langdon 2012 published by Eastside Projects.

2 Mike Nelson, M6, 2013, Blown-out tyres on shot blasted concrete, altered gallery.

3 Foreground: Tacita Dean, Darmstädter Werkblock 2007, 16mm colour film, optical sound, 18 minutes, continuous loop. Background: Joanne Tatham & Tom O'Sullivan / DJ Simpson. Adapted scenery (Eastside Projects) 2009. Painted and wallpapered MDF panels reused to construct gallery walls.

4 Heather & Ivan Morison, You Stay Away From Me. You Hear. 2013 Billboard poster on Billboard Facade of Eastside Projects.



Gavin Wade is Director of Eastside Projects, Birmingham, an artist-curator and publisher of *Strategic Questions*. In 2010 he received the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Breakthrough Fund Award for exceptional cultural entrepreneurs. He has curated solo exhibitions with Gunilla Klingberg, Mike Nelson, Yangjiang Group, William Pope.L, Dan Graham, Carey Young, Liam Gillick, Joanne Tatham & Tom O'Sullivan, Nathan Coley and Bas Jan Ader. Curated projects include: 'Painting Show' (2011-12), Eastside Projects; *Public Structures*, Guang Zhou Triennial, China (2005); and 'In the Midst of Things', Bournville (1999). Books include *UPCYCLE THIS BOOK* (2013) Sternberg; *Has Man A Function In Universe? Book Works* (2008); and *The Interruptors: A Non-Simultaneous Novel*, Article Press (2005).

Fucking Good Art on their publication “Italian Conversations: Art in the age of Berlusconi” interviewed by Sheena Greene

The publication Italian Conversations: Art in the age of Berlusconi 2012 started with an invitation from the Nomas Foundation in Rome, who were interested in an outsider perspective into the complexity of the Italian contemporary art world, its spaces, people and models for culture vis a vis the current political and economic crisis. The funding came from a variety of public and private sources from Italy and the Netherlands. Rob Hamelijncx & Nienke Terpsma put themselves in the position of being outsiders in a local context, but they are insiders in the arts field and the art world.

From January to May 2011 the authors travelled to seven different cities and regions in Italy where they had local contacts and well-informed guides, in the book, who put together an itinerary loosely following the model of the Grand Tour with the aim to explore and research the contemporary artistic, social and political scene from the perspective of visual artists.

Sheena Greene: How do you work together as a duo, how are the tasks and roles performed? Do you maintain your own practice outside of your collaboration?

Rob Hamelijncx: Working together you learn by doing. Certainly we are equal partners in our FGA collective. We are both the artists and editors and Nienke is also a designer. She did her masters in Typography at the famous Werkplaats Typografie in Arnhem with Karel Martens and Wigger Bierma. I do the internet stuff and sound editing, often writing applications for residencies etc. Together we transcribe and edit the conversations, and give feedback on the things we write. From the beginning Fucking Good Art was learning-by-doing. Sometimes we make jokes that we founded our own “master” or “PhD” degree program, and at the same time we are the director, editor-in-chief, assistant, coffee lady/man, and toilet cleaner in one.

We started publishing the Fucking Good Art zine in December 2003. The format was an A3 folded

to A5 sheet of pink paper – in between the magazines we still publish the zines – printed by our printer and friend De Boog in Rotterdam. The first years we did Fucking Good Art at the same time as our individual art practice: Nienke was a photographer, and I was making text-based video and computer works. After 2 years we were too busy with FGA; it took over and we let it happen. We went with the flow, and this felt quite good actually. Fucking Good Art worked, this was a happy experience, it has a dynamic, people are interested in reading our conversations, and we want to share what we find.

SG: What was your motivation to start the collective in the first place. Were you looking for a new creative direction when you started FGA?

RH: Yes we were, and still are. That’s why we playfully connected to Goethe who had embarked on his Grand Tour because he had lost faith and was looking or hoping for a rebirth. We sometimes also feel lost in this confused art world dominated by money, up to the point that we almost lost our belief

in art. So you could say that our travels are to bring back our belief in art.

Nienke Terpsma: The earlier editions were quite different. We started publishing the fanzines on paper and online, as pamphlets for art critique, to invite “makers” to write about art exhibitions and shows in project spaces but also in galleries and museums. There were so many small exhibitions nobody would write about. We are not academics but thought that maybe artists have other things to say about artwork than those with academic backgrounds. We are interested in going over these borders and seeing what differences occur in the different fields.

SG: *Italian Conversations: Art in the age of Berlusconi*, is an art travelogue of seven selected cities whose focus is an exploration of the alternative, fragmented and varied creative solutions to an art system surviving the pressures of political, social and economic crisis throughout Italy. Did the brief from Nomas differ from that of your previous publications? How did you decide on the format for the seven different cities?

NT/RH: The brief was interesting for us, as the situation in Italy seemed relevant for a wider audience in the arts. The decline of public institutions, a right wing populist government and the cultural policies that come with it, are things that are happening all over Europe. We thought that it would be interesting for people in other North European countries, who were starting to face similar issues in cultural policies that Italy had been dealing with for twenty years. It posed many curious questions, very much in line with our interests.

We liked the idea that the close collaboration would make it possible to create a dialogue of perspectives, between insiders and outsiders, rather than just presenting the perspective of outsiders, involving the ‘cicerones’ in each city in the editorial process.

Nomas wanted us to visit the seven cities because these cities have such different cultures. We did think that it would be too much, but we liked the idea. The structure was proposed by Nomas, but was discussed and refined with choices made together. Nomas is based in Rome so that is very different to an art space in Milan. Milan had to be included because it’s Milan and everybody throughout Italy thinks that is where everything in the art world happens. Puglia is interesting for different reasons, like

for the European grants for cultural projects, bringing people back to their region of origin, and so on.

In Italy there are well functioning local art worlds, or eco systems, with private initiatives, public initiatives, around 50 commercial galleries and 20 independent project spaces, so it is double edged. To get onto another platform you need to go to Milan, or something that many people do, is to study abroad. On other hand we were told that it is very possible to have a sustainable practice at a local level.

SG: Did the concept of the Eighteenth century “Grand Tour” for aristocratic tourists, accompanied by local “ciceroni” tour guides, help you develop your field trip and did you do much research into historical travel journeys?



NT/RH: Yes of course we were aware that the Grand Tour is a commonly used theme and although we played with that, it was quite tongue & cheek. The theme is so often used throughout the art world. In FGA#10, *The Interviews* Catherine David said to us ‘Art is not tourism.’ The Grand Tour is a very interesting history of course, and we read about it to some extent. However we didn’t have much time for the many historical treasures of Italy during this trip. We were quite busy going from basement gallery to white painted off space, to talk with people who are trying to formulate and actually experiment alternative ways of working in the arts.

SG: Why did you decide to produce this work as a book, did you consider producing an exhibition?

NT/RH: Interesting question, because we’re so happy with the magazine as an independent space, outside of the “white cube”. We like books, you can take them with you, open them when you feel like it, and their distribution is relatively simple and affordable. But we have been thinking for some time now

about alternative ways to develop our research other than through print publishing. We like publishing, so we will keep doing this, but expanding into space would be another experience and change the role of the publication. This could be interesting; in our case it will not be a “catalogue”, it will be an independent object.

We had a plan to, in addition to *Art in the Age of Berlusconi*; to make a huge structure built up of ‘an institute of contemporary art in Italy.’ A large scale model of independent spaces and collectives, all pasted together into one building, to show that there is an other important structure of independent spaces. There are many art worlds, not just “the” art world.

This structure, or sub culture, is what we are very interested in: we talk about artist-run, curator-led, off-off, alternative, independent, no-budget, low-budget, high-budget, self-funded, non-profit, private foundation, discursive space, project space, art spaces, etc.

What all these spaces have in common is that they support experimentation, research, production and intellectual debate. Without these private initiatives (and some galleries belong to this group too) there would be no contemporary art scene in Italy.

The reason we want to repeatedly show the independent spaces is that they are a fundamental alternative to the growing dominance of the art market. The problem is that the (art) market has become the criterion by which works of art are judged. We are against that. The Venice Biennale should not be an art fair.

SG: Do you see your role as being like the curator, by researching various elements and practices and assembling them together?

NT/RH: Yes we see what you are aiming at. There is a resemblance with how curators work. It is not really important for us. As artists we have the freedom to occupy different fields. On the other hand artists have always been doing research in and through art. Not long ago a good friend asked us when we were going to curate our first show, because he had the impression that would be a natural step to make, and because after almost 9 years of collaborating with other artists our network is really big.

You could say our art practice is out in the “expanded field” of art. It is not always easy. There are still many people who have very conservative ideas about what art is and what it is not, and how it should look. Fucking Good Art could be understood with historical references to the 1970s, the tradition of text works and artists’ publications and magazines.

SG: I was struck by many of your interviewees’ comments on the poor quality of art education currently in Italy; yet some of these people who are lecturers, artists, curators and critics came across as having high levels of critical analysis and original points of view. Professor Concetto Pozzato, a retired Professor of art from Bologna Academy of Art states, “A great teacher teaches what he doesn’t know” What are your opinions of the art education in Italy and how does it compare to that of Holland?

NT/RH: We cannot have any judgment or claim any knowledge of art education in Italy, we can only tell you about the opinions of the people we spoke to from the art field regarding the art schools.

What we did find interesting is that we met a lot of artists that had other backgrounds; they studied sociology or medicine, or archaeology, or architecture, but never studied at an art academy. This is actually quite an interesting phenomenon. We know of two friends who are academics and recently decided to become artists because in their own field there is no work in the first place, and if they find work, they experience a lack of creative space in their fields. It’s interesting also that there are people who feel the need to start schools due to a perceived lack of good education. In Italy the lack they describe seems to be mainly about a connection to the art field. People say it is out-dated, unconnected and not realistic about the art world today.

In Italy there are also private institutions with a different approach to art education. One of the most well known is Cittadellarte Fondazione Pistoletto, but also Young Curators Residency Project at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Spinola Banna in Turin, and Fondazione Antonio Ratti in Como to name a few. People now start private art courses, like summer schools. Also in Berlin Auto-center has for the second year planned a summer course. The students, who might or might not have studied art, get a complementary education.

SG: Having just visited the Milan Art Fair (2013) do you think that a public institution for contemporary art in Milan would be able to compete, and to offer the same vibrancy, vitality and energy of what is currently on offer through the non-public sector?

NT/RH: Perhaps the fact you find this vitality and energy around the art fair rather than in the public institutions is just an indicator of where the power and the money are concentrated at the moment. In your question you differentiate between public and non-public. We noticed that in some countries people make a division between profit and non-profit, in others between institutions and independents, in Italy people differentiate between private and state, with the knowledge that the marriage between state and big business is quite clear. Talking about art spaces you could also divide between big budget and small budget. An art foundation of a fashion company for instance can be non-profit but with a huge budget.

Anthropologist David Graeber in his book *Debt: The First 5000 Years* argues that the dichotomy between state and market is a false one, and that states created markets. We also confuse the notions 'public' and 'state', but it's not so clear anymore if state institutions represent the public realm. In Italy it seems they are not perceived like that. In Italy many 'public' institutions have no budget; and we are told there is a big lack of cooperation and trust between the institutions, private initiatives and private individuals.

At our presentation at the ZHdK we showed a short video made in PAN – Palazzo Arti Napoli. PAN was set up about 5 years prior with a big budget and high expectations, but the money has been pulled out due to cutbacks and politics. Curator Olga Scotto di Vettimo was now running PAN with no funding because they were in between elections.¹

It's interesting that in Italy some people in the arts argue that they have to claim back the public institutions instead of working in their own private spaces. Others say to forget the institutions, but let's create a new structure to connect all these small private initiatives!

In our book there is a list, compiled together with all the partners, of approximately 135 initiatives or aesthetic zones in the 7 territories we visited, but there are certainly many more People do miracles

without a budget, exploring different ways of making and sharing art outside of the mainstream.

Notes

1 That was the case in Spring, 2011. Less is known about the current situation especially the increasing economic and political crisis.

Captions

1 Pile of transcripts, test-versions and dummies for 'Art in the Age of Berlusconi'.

2 Post-print handwork; a stamp on the side, the poster ("Genealogy of Damnatio Memoriae Italy 1947–1993", artist contribution by Roman artist duo Goldiechiari) folded and glued in, and the questionnaire for Napoli artist Ciro Vitale inserted.

3 'A note on the English', a contribution by translator and novelist Vincenzo Latronico

*Dutch artists, editors and non-academic free-style researchers Rob Hamelijncx and Nienke Terpsma are best known as editors of Fucking Good Art, founded in December 2003. They are based in the Metropolitan area Randstad (Rotterdam), and Berlin. **Fucking Good Art** is a travelling artists' magazine or editorial project for research in-and-through art, both on paper and online. The paper edition ranges from an A3 pamphlet to publications in book format. In addition, Fucking Good Art makes web radio broadcasts, and video works. We are interested in: oral history, ethnography, documentary film, new modes of investigative art and journalism, counter- and sub cultures, self-organisation and DIY strategies, art and resistance, and anarchism. We have a participatory strategy and are by nature highly sensitive to the context we are in.*

In the past, the artists settled for shorter or longer periods in, among other places, Munich, Berlin, Dresden, Copenhagen, Riga, Basel, Zurich, São Paulo, the Harbor of Rotterdam, Tbilisi, and recently in Geneva (Feb-May 2013) to make editions of Fucking Good Art on the basis of the local context and in a constantly changing collective of artists, curators, makers and thinkers.



Authorship (ext)ended: artist, artwork, public and the curator: Ute Meta Bauer and Yvonne P. Doderer

interviewed by Annemarie Brand
and Monika Molnár

Annemarie Brand & Monika Molnár: We are currently at the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, where the exhibition, *Acts of Voicing. On the Poetics and Politics of the Voice* (October 12, 2012 – January 13, 2013) is showing. We would like to ask you both the role of the audience in an exhibition. In the context of this exhibition, the voice of the artist and the public are particularly important. Is it possible to think about this as a triangle; between the artists, audience and the curator?

Ute Meta Bauer: I have a problem with the term audience, I would rather talk about a “public” - the attempt of artists, curators to establish a public space. Because an audience to me is kind of passive. If you talk about a public you begin to establish a dialog among artists, curators and those who join a discourse, a crucial triangle. If I curate an exhibition I'd rather address a public than an audience.

Yvonne P. Doderer: I agree.

UMB: It is about dialogue. If you exhibit a work of art, you react to something. This dialogue engages different languages. But it is also about an exchange of experiences.

YPD: On the other hand, and at a certain point, the public is also alone, for example, during the visit of an exhibition: Because not in every moment is there a direct communication and interaction between artist, curator and public possible -

therefore not less curators and leaders of art institutions are organizing panels and talks functioning as a platform of exchange between producers, intermediators and recipients.

On the one hand, and at a certain point, the public is also not alone. For example, while visiting an exhibition it is not always possible for direct communication to occur between artist, curator and the public. Therefore, curators and directors of art institutions are organizing panels and talks, functioning as a platform of exchange between producers, intermediators and recipients. And at the end of the day maybe it is even, like Roland Barthes said in the *Death of the Author* (1967)¹, the issue that the public creates its own exhibition by its own ways of “reading” an exhibition.

UMB I don't think the public is ever alone.

YPD Not ever, but there are moments where the public is alone in and with the exhibition and the art works.

UMB As an artist you are also alone in the studio and as a curator when you develop your concept you are also usually alone.

AMB & MM: Do you mean alone physically or in an intangible way?

YPD I mean in both ways.

UMB The dialogue is what you produce, something what you generate.

YPD The – or better to say – a dialog is created by the exhibition already - although it might be not outspoken or being developed on inner level of reception.

UMB The artists generate a work, a position and the curator discovers the artist or a particular work, and then they communicate to a particular imaginary audience. This doesn't work that easy for me, its more complex. Artists are reacting upon what is going on around them, even if they say, "I am an artist with a unique position". Also a curator has her or his own agenda. I usually have an idea of what I want to show, and then I look at which artist corresponds with that and I even have an idea of who is going to see it. I think there is a triangle, but it might not be spoken communication.

AMB & MM How did your artistic collaboration begin?

YPD I do not remember exactly. Ute invited me when she was the director at the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, which in those days was starting to be well known in the international art scene.



UMB You also wrote for the magazine META that I edited. This is the result of such triangle. I met Yvonne first when she came to attend the exhibitions at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart and we shared conversations along with other regular guests. Knowing your public, already establishes a dialogue.

This is how our collaboration began. It's not just about a having a conversation; it's also about



entering together the field of production. At one point you recognize the people who come to attend your exhibitions and events are those who constitute a public. And what is crucial: conversations and collaborations generate friendships. For example the exhibition *Friends* (1993) at the Künstlerhaus, was exactly reflecting the situations that at some point the audience transforms into a highly valuable community.

YPD Our next collaboration that developed out of that was the project *Raumstruktur* for the exhibition *when tekkno turns to sound of poetry* at the Shedhalle Zurich 1994.²

UMB Yes, Sabeth Buchmann, Marion von Osten and Juliane Rebentisch invited us to produce the introduction text for this exhibition project. I suggested to Yvonne to produce a texture rather than a text, a kind of spatial narrative as a point of entry and reference for the whole project and *when tekkno turns turns to sound of poetry*.

YPD Moreover, it gave us a starting point, to refer to what was going on during the 1970s. During these years a lot of crucial things happened - in technology, in science, but also in society; for example the women's movement – second wave feminism got strong. In architecture the debate about structuralism began, in natural sciences biology, biotechnology and genetic research replaced physics as the leading

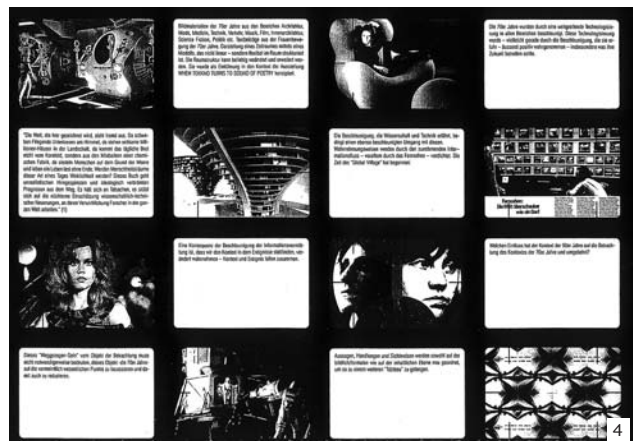
discipline - a lot of issues we are dealing with today originated in the 1970s. It is a indeed an interesting period, to have a look again into this decade - that's what our project was about. We repurposed the *House of Cards*, a modular system originally created by Ray and Charles Eames, by replacing their visuals with images and texts from the 1970s. Additionally we published a text-image collage in the art magazine ANYP edited by minimal club, that was later reprinted in a publication by curator Ine Gevers and artist Jeanne van Heeswijk.³



AMB & MM: Ute, in a talk at the Monash University in Melbourne you mentioned that in the past it was the artist who curated exhibitions or generated context to present their work; and the role of curator didn't exist at all. Do you think that in the present moment, the role of the artist has merged with the role of the curator⁴?

UMB Kind of. A century ago, artist movements would present themselves in shows that they conceived as artists. There weren't any curators. It was the artists themselves who would develop highly interesting concepts and install their exhibitions in a very particular way. Today the field of curating is more diversified; there are still many artists who keep control the way their exhibitions are curated, most likely if it comes to a solo show. Most artists have a very distinct idea of how their exhibition should look. There circulates still this myth "curators dominate artists," but in reality, there are not too many artists a curator can dominate. Artists have pretty strong egos.

Today for the first time there is a generation of trained curators, and of course this changes the practice of making exhibitions. In my generation, and that was widely the case, curators were trained art historians, artists, writers, former gallerists, you name it. My generation produced what one could call "amateur" curators who entered the field with a "learning by doing" approach. But my generation had a strong interest in what curating could and should mean in practice and theory, and that in a way initiated curatorial education and courses. It is kind of a similar process as it was the case with the first generation of artist exploring video and performance as a new practice. Those artists such as Joan Jonas, Bruce Nauman, Dara Birnbaum, Yvonne Rainer came from painting, were sculptors, were architects or dancers etc and experimented and experimented with this new media. This is how I came to curating as someone initially educated as a stage designer and artist. It was a new territory to explore, a new medium of artistic practice.



Take someone like Hans Ulrich Obrist, who is born in Switzerland, and who had this idea at pretty young age that he wanted to be an visionary curator like Harald Szeemann. Obrist was back then attending the renowned management school of St. Gallen, and he visited many well known artist with the plan to become a curator beyond what in those days determined a museum conservator or "Kustos". In those days the notion of a curator the way the term is understood today, simply did not exist or was not recognized as such, Without sounding too romantic - to be a curator was an obsession for my generation, rather that a profession.

YPD Indeed Hans Ulrich was also influenced by you.

UMB Hans Ulrich?

YPD I think so, no?

UMB No, I wouldn't say so. He was very interested and supported the projects I did, but his big inspiration was Harald Szeemann and his notion of the curator as "intellectual guest worker", but also Jean Christophe Amman and Kasper Koenig. But his early mentors were artists including Roman Signer, who was based in St. Gallen as Hans Ulrich, as well as Peter Fischli and David Weiss.

AMB&MM How does it feel to be a female artist-curator in the male dominated art world? Do you think anything has changed?

UMB I would say, since about ten years things have recognisably changed. Today women are directors of museums and biennales. There is still inequality, but the demography has definitely improved, actually more in the curatorial field than in the artist's field, where men still are the top sellers. where for the first The first time women to direct the Venice Biennale were Maria de Corral and Rosa Martinez⁵. It required obviously two women to equal one man for the president of the Biennale. Bice Curiger⁶ was the first women to be fully in charge, more than a decade after Catherine David was the first woman to direct a Documenta. In that respect the field has changed, but there is still a "but....".

YPD If it comes to artists, I recently read a statistic compiled in Germany about the income of artists, comparing male to female. These statistics are from the years 1995 to 2000⁷ and I do not think that a lot has changed. Women earn about one third less than their male counterparts in the arts - similar to most other areas of employment, where women earn up to 28% less than men for the very same work.

UMB What I find dramatic and what we should also not forget is about how many professional people, internationally, are in indeed in the position to define a field. How many people do you have from Africa, from Latin America, from other places, who are really recognized and respected as top curators, especially of female? I think there is still a gap.

You have some influential women in so called power positions, but they most often work in the USA. It is more difficult for female curators in Latin America, the Middle East to serve in a top position, if you are belong to a family that is already in power. Sorry to say.

YPD You can add sexual identity as well, for example in the art world you can find way more gay men in influential positions or as well acknowledged artists while you find significantly less lesbians. Even more so there exists still a male heterosexual dominance, but also a gay male dominance. If we talk about race, class, gender, we can't exclude to reflect about sexual identity. Although the art scene is considered a much more open and pleasant scene as all the other professional fields, it is nevertheless not completely free from societal categories and norms especially if it comes to money and power.



UMB It's also about strong networks, how influential certain networks are, there is a reason why two decades ago there was quite a log of debated about "old boys networks". There is not less pressure in terms of local politics on the big players in the museum scene because of their strong trustees and collector base. In a number of Latin American countries, such as Brazil, Mexico, there is indeed a strong collector base. They want to see the art works they collect to be visible in major museums ranging from MoMa to Tate Modern, they support those museums and this creates the conditions for art history to be rewritten and more inclusive. Unfortunately its less due to the impact of scholars in the field who have called for this for decades, including the periodical *Third Text*, co-founded by Rasheed Areen to give an example.

It's much more complicated today than it was in the past. In Eastern Europe for example, women have been a major force in the cultural sector.

Women directed many Eastern European museums but it was considered then a less powerful field. In terms of the economies in Eastern Europe to be a museum director was not considered the same than to direct MoMA, the Met or the Louvre. You also have a close look at societal conditions; when is it attractive to hold a certain position? If we look a little deeper one understands the economic setting, this needs to be made more transparent and we need to be aware of those contexts and conditions.

Specifically for students at times it's not easy to understand why things are the way they are. If you understand the structure pattern underneath, it makes it easier to oppose such structures. In order to change the pattern, or disturb such systemic fixtures in a constructive way, you have to be familiar with its code. This is why theoretical education is so crucial also in our field, its kind of equivalent like computer programming or structural engineering, you need to know how its functioning in order to invent it anew..

AMBE&MM

How do you confront global and transcendent problems related to art production, as women? What are the gestures that made a radical turn in art history?

UMB There is currently an exhibition at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, *Mythos Atelier* (2012/2013) that is introducing the importance and relevance of the studio of the artist on artistic production and how this changed over time. Indeed a highly interesting subject. A colleague who saw the show told me that there are only two female artists included, although this vast show is spanning several centuries. No matter how you read this information – its telling a lot: maybe female artists did not have documented studios on their own, maybe they shared it with male artists, maybe they centuries ago worked under a male name. But in the last century women of course had their own studios, even if small or maybe their kitchen functioned as such. Having access to production determines the acceptance of being a female artist, so of course all of those aspects are critical.

Still twenty years ago, a gallery would tell you straight in your face, that they are hesitant to commit to female artists in their gallery programme, because they might have children and therefore a long term investment in their career is a bigger risk than supporting the career of a male artist. This luckily has changed.

YPD But until today this exclusion and invisibility of female productivity is continuing. Have a look into art lexica, you still find less female painters listed for example. The question is not only about re-inscribing female artists into art history to write history. An exhibition at the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt in 2008⁸ was focusing on female impressionists. On one hand this effort is positive in order to close the gap in art historical narratives, but on the other hand such exhibitions bare the danger of positive discrimination, the female artist becomes a kind of “specific species”. The discussion about gender, queer and transgender issues is by no means at an end point – not in the everyday, not in the art world.

UMB Yvonne, you are actually teaching gender studies as a professor in Duesseldorf. In the late nineties at the Academy of Fine Vienna we were also also introducing gender studies and colonial studies as a required subject into the fine art curriculum. On the other side we discussed that a focus on gender and postcolonial reading should be part of every class and subject we teach. For example, my colleague Sarat Maharaj is an art historian by training, and as he is of indian origin and grew up in South Africa. He is often asked to talk about art in India. But besides working indeed on post colonial debates and its challenges, he is a specialist in the work of Marcel Duchamp and has been close to Richard Hamilton over decades, he is kind of a “Joycean”, and that raises often a big surprise even amongst his art history peers.

YPD In terms of gender biology does not determine how you use or not use power.

And furthermore - the artistic and cultural fields are still open enough to offer various possibilities to introduce and produce a critical discourse about various issues - although this potential and freedom is in danger as in the rest of our societies and especially at universities. The economization of societies - successfully demanded and enforced by neoliberal politics - already demolished a lot of spaces and possibilities to create other practices and visions concerning life as well as art, culture and knowledge production.

UMB I still see the role of cultural institutions to serve as critical platforms, but it is less and less the case. I sense that the current crisis around the globe are not only economical although for sure they are driven by it, but I also sense a spiritual crisis, the loss of identities, ideologies and those getting reintro-

duced often in a very manipulative way. But in terms of art I experience a new ideology that is indeed the art market, and the market intrinsically rules art production. Art institutions in terms of acquisitions, currently are very depended of developments on the market, they have to compete with potent private collectors, the field became on the one side more open, more global, more influential but also way more complicated.

MM & AMB: What would be your recommendation for the next generation of curators, if any?

YPD: Meanwhile curating is taught at special courses, at academies and universities, it is no longer a practice you have to develop by yourself. And an academization always incorporates a certain distance to the topic and to the people – in this case to the artists and the public. Additionally institutions like universities and art academies like all scientific knowledge production operate within a specific power frame and field that determines the topics as well as the methods used to gain specific knowledge and to develop a certain practice. From my perspective these circumstances and power structures have to be kept in mind and to be reflected critically.

Notes

1 See details under <http://artblog.catherinehoman.com/roland-barthes-the-death-of-the-author-critical-summary/>

2 <http://archiv.shedhalle.ch/dt/programm/zeitung/06/vonosten/index.shtml>

3 Bauer, Ute Meta; Doderer, Yvonne P. "Raumstruktur". In: Gevers, Ine; van Heeswijk, Jeanne (eds.) *Beyond Ethics and Aesthetics*. Sun Publishers, Nijmegen 1997.

4 The entire talk can be accessed here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMko9dror4M>

5 <http://universes-in-universe.de/car/venezia/bien51/english.htm>; 51st Venice Biennial, 2005

6 <http://www.kunstaspekte.de/index.php?action=webpages&k=9749>

7 <http://www.kulturrat.de/detail.php?detail=1293&rubrik=86>

8 <http://www.schirn-kunsthalle.de/>

Captions

1 Ute Meta Bauer & Yvonne P. Doderer: "Raumstruktur", modular system (1994 – 1995). Originally created for the exhibition "when tekno

turns to sound of poetry", Shedhalle Zurich, 1994 and Kunstwerke Berlin, 1995. Installation view from the exhibition "Oh, My Complex. On Unease at Beholding the City", Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, 2012.

2 Informationspace of "Bridge / The map is not the territory", a project commissioned by the working partnership Fleetinsel in cooperation with the Hamburg Department of Culture in 1997 – the section "Bridge" was curated by Ute Meta Bauer in collaboration with the artist Fared Armaly, who also developed the overall design of the whole project. Yvonne P. Doderer participated with "Topology & Research – a folding map".

3 Ute Meta Bauer & Yvonne P. Doderer collaborated on this exhibition in 2001. More details can be found here: <http://www.firststory.net/>

4 Ute Meta Bauer; Yvonne P. Doderer. "Raumstruktur". In: A.N.Y.P., Nr. 6, Minimal Club (Hg.), Berlin 1998

5 First Story – Women Building / New Narratives for the 21st Century: View on Decide for Yourself by Women on Waves, Porto 2001 photo © Rita Burmester

Ute Meta Bauer is Associate Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, USA and was educated as artist at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Hamburg where she received her Diploma with Honours in Visual Communication/Stage Design in 1987. Since 25 years she is a curator of exhibitions and presentations on contemporary art, film, video and sound, with a focus on transdisciplinary formats. She publishes regularly on artistic and curatorial practice and education, co-edited *Intellectual Birdhouse. Artistic Practice as Research with Florian Dombois, Michael Schwab and Claudia Mareis* (London, 2012) and as well World Biennale Forum No 1 – Shifting Gravity together with Hou Hanru (*Ostfildern, Gwangju*, 2013).

Yvonne P. Doderer works in scientific, artistic and cultural fields as researcher, author, lecturer and cultural producer. Currently she is Professor at the University of Applied Sciences in Düsseldorf, visiting lecturer at the Merz Academy in Stuttgart and head of the "Office for Transdisciplinary Research and Cultural Production". Doderer studied architecture and urban planning at the Technical University of Stuttgart and completed her PhD with excellence at the University of Dortmund, Faculty of Spatial Planning. Her research and production areas focus on Urban and Spatial Theories, Gender, Media and Cultural Studies as well as Contemporary Art.

Tania Bruguera

Interviewed by Ashraf Osman

Interviewed in December, 2012 at the Immigrant Movement International offices in Queens, New York City

Transcribed by Daniela N. Fuentes & Ashraf Osman

Ashraf Osman: I am very interested in your current project, *Immigrant Movement International*. I'd like to know how it has been received in New York? It is very different from the so-called "mainstream art world", especially here in New York. This project puts an emphasis on providing assistance to immigrants, a minority group in our society.

Tania Bruguera: I'm very happy and very focused on showing art in a specific way in this project. The whole project is an art piece; it proposes and questions, "Can art be useful?" This is a piece of useful art. But the way in which the *users* of the project—because I don't like participants for this project—they are not participating, because it's not like a party, they come to, dance, and leave. This is their life. People come here every day and they're family. And I know it sounds corny, and for people who don't do this kind of work it sounds fake or like trying to sell the project. But it is that way, literally: these are the people I live with.

I feel that useful art has two ways to be experienced, one way is from the "art side", which is, to look at how the artist structures the project and how they have developed the idea. If you experience the project from the user's side, then for me, it's more about, "what do I get from it?" It doesn't matter if it is art or not. It feels to me that depending on the intensity of your involvement in the project you can get to one side or the other. Let's say I do one workshop and you just come for the workshop. You come, you take the knowledge, and you leave. You come, let's say, to two workshops. You start coming to "Make a Movement", which is a very important part of the project, the mobilizing area of the project. We have meetings and we talk about how to express ourselves in the social sphere, the political sphere, and all that. And for that we introduce art. We do presentations, like slideshows, on contemporary art in the public sphere.

The *New York Times* wrote a big article on the project¹; I didn't communicate correctly what *performing* is, and the writer understood performance as living with poor people, which is an offence for me. I hope as a performance artist I'm a little more sophisticated than that; it's just simplistic and too silly. For me it was important to be really deep in the neighbourhood. Instead of living in Manhattan and coming here from 10am to 5pm, I will really make this my life, not just a project. This project needs to become part of your life, if you are working here. I wanted to see the little details of what people say, what we are like, buying food next door, or having a natural relationship with the community. I live here all the time, to be honest; I don't wish to live in Brooklyn, or anywhere else.

AO: Is it possible to even consider your project as contemporary art? How do you mediate this to your participants or users?

TB: We don't state that, "this is contemporary art". We take the point of view that this is a language too, a communication tool. This person did this in the public sphere; this was the reaction it got from the people passing by. This is the reaction it got from authorities; this is the reaction it got long-term, after the project was done, that's the impact. So, art is coming to people here as a natural tool, not as an unreachable practice that has a history that they would never have access to.

I always use this example because it's the clearest one: For the mothers in the community, we had one English class that was focused on English relating to art history, to address identity issues. That's the way we do workshops here, they never have one goal; we never teach just English, the class has at least two, when they are good three goals. By the end of the class, they went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to see art. But they were not scared; they loved it.



They want to go back to the museum—not because they have to go to the museum, because it’s an artwork and we’re artists. No, it’s because they created their own emotional connection to art. I am against having only one connection to art, which is a historicized connection. Like, “Oh yes, I like art because I know that this comes from three different previous artworks and it’s a dialogue with the history of art.” From the beginning, if anybody comes here we say, “This is an art project, initiated by an artist, etc.” Then we go on to what they want to hear, we say it because we want to say it, we don’t want to misrepresent the project. People don’t really hear it because it’s not what they’re looking for.

AO: The project has become very well known, amongst artists, curators and other cultural workers. How have you developed projects with artists who wish to become part of Immigrant Movement International?

TB: We’ve had some people who have proposed projects, proposed workshops. And all the workshops are in the crossroads between the user and the art, and the social and the art—all of them. As I say, there are 3 intentions: one has to be artistic or related to art—and also it’s related to art because we are questioning, what is the use of art? And what is the way which you can introduce people to art? Art as a tool, as you said before.

The people who come from art, the observers, they have this idea where they, from afar, like you, know about the project somehow, and then they read about it, if they’re nice. If they’re good they have read more than just the *New York Times* article. I say all the time, “you have to come here, because you have to feel it.” Then they come interact and, hopefully, they propose a workshop. And, if you propose a workshop, the workshop is the exact point between the two. If you are a user you are actually experiencing art, and if you are an art person you are proposing art. Usually it’s very hard, not everybody goes all the way.

AO: It seems a lot of the difficulties that you’re describing are part of the project and how you want it to be: Independent, rejecting the commercialism of the art world. Some of your work has been criticised for the lack of documentation, compared to other similar projects. In your previous long-term work, [*Cátedra*] *Arte de Conducta* [2002-2009], you set up an art school in Havana, which you financed partly through via the US, where you were teaching at the

time, and Cuba. Do you consider using the similar difference in economies here, between the commercial object-based part to finance the social non-object part?

TB: I have to confess something. Yesterday in the retreat my entire staff and people involved with the project were pressuring me to do objects to sell, as a kind of residue of the project, to have a residual element. It’s complicated because I never had a loving relationship with the market. I think it’s a problem I have. I’m not proud of it; I think as an artist I haven’t solved that. And I think it’s an integral part of being in the art world. But I haven’t solved it because I don’t want to give up. So I feel that every time I have come close to have a gallery or have a commercial show, I always feel violated because I think I haven’t had good luck. It’s like love: you can have ten lovers and never have love. I have not found so far a person that understands my work and is in the commercial area. I have still one gallery in Spain and she doesn’t know what to do with me, and she’s the best experience I had because she leaves me alone and says, “Do whatever you want in the gallery.” But she hasn’t sold anything. So I have become unfortunately a prestige token artist for galleries instead of a commercial artist for the gallery—which, in a way at the beginning, I was very honoured by. But on the practical side I’m very frustrated. I had three galleries and I left two of them. This one I didn’t leave because I felt it’s going to look very bad if I leave all the galleries, like “Oh, she’s problematic.” And also she has never pushed me to do something I don’t want. So I would love to one day find a gallerist or somebody in the art world who will understand and have a theoretical and academic conversation with me—not a money conversation—like, “let’s sit down and think about how the art transforms over time.” And even that transformation, there is a space for somebody to acquire the process of transforming it—which is not to objectify this.

AO: You began your artistic career with a *Tribute to Ana Mendieta*, which is an unusual, as you’re starting not with your own individual work, but with reinterpreting somebody else’s work. Did you do that on purpose?

TB: I have to be honest: I’m not an artist who, before starting the work, spends six months thinking and then does the work. At the time it started as a very emotional thing, and it started because we were introduced to her work; she was still alive, and I was a student.

She was in the US then; I never met her. I have a friend who says, “It’s because you never met her your relationship was so intense.”

Basically we were a group of art students, and were very much into art, discussing and reading all the time. We started visiting established artists, who were our professors, and were going to their houses and having conversations with the classmates. One of the people who were doing that was [Gerardo] Mosquera, who is a very well known critic in Cuba, and he introduced us to Ana Mendieta’s work. It was because another guy from the group was doing a work that was very similar to what she was doing. And he introduced him to her while we were all in the room, and my first reaction was “Wow! A woman!” Every artist we were introduced to ‘til then was a man. She was a role model; I was the only girl in the group. And then, he told us, “We are going to introduce you guys to her because she travels a lot.” This was in ‘84 or ‘85.

And then, five or six months later, we went to a lecture by Mosquera, and he says that Ana Mendieta has died. It was very emotional for him because he knew her and she had a big impact on the older Cuban generation. And I was so shocked because I am not meeting her; it is so sad. I didn’t understand at the time the implication of her death, and everything that came later. Then I started obsessing about it and thought, “Ok, I want to know more about this person.”

AO: After *Tribute to Ana Mendieta* you went on to produce more individual work that wasn’t directly referencing other artists, such as your performance *The Burden of Guilt* [1997-1999]. What compelled you to make that shift?

TB: I have to say, for me the most important work I have done is *Ana Mendieta*, which is sad, that the first work I do is the most important. What I liked so much about the first two works I did is that it was claimed they were a failure... I felt I was going through a very interesting and challenging kind of art practice, taking somebody else’s artwork, and getting into trouble, Galerie Lelong wanted to sue me... They felt I was an eighteen years old girl and they were threatened that I was going to sell it or something. Now everybody is happy about re-enacting; but the tough time was when I was doing it.

The thing is, I was doing art that was questioning what art is—not just “What is art?” because I am

not a formalist; but “What is art for?” I always thought in terms of the uses of art. I was really enjoying this kind of I-don’t-know-what-I-am-doing situation.



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The other work I really like is the newspaper [*Memory of the Post-war*, 1993-1994], because it was again the same gesture of non-authorship. I really like it because I took over a resource that is not from the art world, but it is a resource from power, which is information.

AO: For that reasons would you say that some of the collaborations you became involved with in Cuba became problematised. Would you consider this to be a failure or a success?

TB: Well, it was a moment in which I was introduced to responsibility. I realized that I couldn’t just do whatever I want; there are consequences if you do certain things and you have to deal with that.

The first time the Council, the official people from the art world, called me in [for questioning], I

didn't know that at the same time they called in a guy that was working with me, doing the design. When I got out and went home, there was a friend in my house who said David was taken into questioning. I went to his house and his mother made me feel so bad, saying "Look what you are doing! You are so irresponsible! Because of you, my kid has problems..." For girls it was easier to get away, but for men there is a bigger implication to get in trouble [with the authorities].

My father was pressured to bring me to the secret police, I was interrogated in front of him by those guys who I printed material about, where I printed it, who is sponsoring, who is behind it... I was so offended because I thought, what do you mean? I am not smart enough to do this? I felt offended as an artist. It was my idea to do a newspaper; I am so proud of that. Do you mean somebody from the CIA put this idea in my head?

It was very damaging, the aftermath of the experience. I never really felt that I was doing something wrong, and that's everything in my work. I never feel I am doing something wrong, so I hate when people accuse me of being a "provocateur". Because when I do things, I believe in what I am doing, and I do not see any problem with it. It was a very intense and abusive consequence and I was only 23 or 22; so it was a lot. I even have a headache when I think about it. So it was very intense because I felt like I really lost his friendship, in the process.

AO: Do you think, in retrospect, that something so intense made you want to take sole ownership of your projects or do just the opposite and diffuse that ownership?

TB: I was very traumatized by the experience. I really enjoyed doing it because I really liked being with people and asking people, "Give me a thing for the newspaper!" It felt so right. People were so excited and enthusiastic about it, and it got known. People were making photocopies—in Cuba for people to make photocopies is not easy—and passing along the newspaper. And everybody was passing along the newspaper, and it was circulating the way I wanted, which is not in a museum but through people. It actually got to people outside the art world, which was my main goal. It was great; everybody was reading it! People who were not artists also knew about it and were reading it. I think infiltrating that sphere was very important—and that is from my socialist background, that art is for everybody. But after that, I didn't do anything for a while. And I have to tell you something, now it is very easy to say, "Oh I did the Ana Mendieta [series] and it was transgressing authorship". But at the time it felt very difficult, because everybody else was doing their own etiquette work, their own labelled image, their own personal work, and I am the only one who in that context didn't want to do it. I felt I was not a real artist; and I am not an artist because I am not able to come up with my own thing.



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AO: After this experience, did you then decide to assert yourself in your own work and your own authorial privileges?

TB: I think it was not so much about authorship but about responsibility. I thought, “If I do something I am getting so many into trouble.” It was more that I was traumatized by the experience with David. I thought if I get somebody into trouble it’s going to be hard; and then I decided I am going to do everything by myself. It will be only me responsible, if something happens; I didn’t want to implicate other people in problems. I think it was more because of that that I focused on myself; but I didn’t feel so comfortable. I mean, it feels good to do a performance; it is an adrenaline [rush] that is amazing. I really liked it! But after I did it for a while, it became like a practice and I didn’t like it anymore. Also, I felt like I did performance because I wanted people to have a memory to bring back home. But then it became too “art”: the image and the photos, and then they were publishing these photos everywhere. And I was thinking, it is not about the photo...

AO: Is that why took yourself out of the performance afterwards? Because the series you did after, the *Untitled* [2000, 2002, 2007, 2009] and *Tatlin’s Whisper* [2008, 2009] series, you weren’t in the performance anymore.

TB: Exactly, I feel like the performance period was torture for me. I feel amazing doing it—I really like doing performance, I have to be honest. But it was torture, because I felt like I did my healing process in public, basically. I think that performance period was a healing process from what happened. But I was tired of doing performance, and I felt I was in a circle. I felt nobody in Cuba was being honest with me about what they think about my work. Or if they were, it was not the level I wanted; I wanted a higher level of criticism. So I went back to art school; I came to the United States to study after that.

I had a different set of questioning, different political aspects: in Cuba the political is the government; there is no idea of the personal political or police. The power relation between you and me, or between the person who just came and me—it is not something that is thought about or expressed in Cuba. It exists and actually is very present—even more than here; but it is not how you normally interpret politics or political art. You interpret your dialogue with the power structure of the government

and their policies, the laws, and the macro-politics. And when I came here, I started thinking about this power relationship, and what is dominant and what is submissive, and all this kind of thing. It was very confusing to me, and what happened is that the way my work was interpreted was as a feminist work. And I am feminist, but I don’t want my work to be identified in such an easy way, because I always fight against reduction. Every time people come they’re reducing things. Then you don’t do your process with the work, because you just assume and move on.



Part of the criticism I got is, your work is feminist because you are using yourself—this idea of the personal politics and the art history of the 70’s. And I started to have problems because I don’t identify with this. Why, if woman is a figure that has been used for liberty, equality, for other symbolic aims—not that I think that was right—why can I only be reduced to my only personal story? And I cannot be, when I am performing, representing a concept? So it was a big fight with the professors. And then decided: ok, I am not a performance artist; I don’t want to be a performance artist. I don’t want to be in the tradition of the American performance art or body art; I don’t care about body. It is not about the body; it’s about the interaction, the social experience. And then I thought, “I have to stop this.” The combination of that and the idea that I have to take responsibility of everything—and I was tired of that; it was a big burden, not to be able to do what I want to do because if I do it, bad things will happen—it was intense. And then I realized: ok, I’ll do Behaviour Art, *Arte de Conducta*; I don’t do performance. And it was also a political gesture I had, when I left the school, because I didn’t want to be analyzed by art historians in the tradition of the American performance or body art.

AO: In that tradition of Behaviour Art, where the audience's behaviour in reaction to your installation or performance can be construed as the primary material for the artwork, you were back to being—not to say provocative, but you did provoke strong reaction, such as with your *Untitled* series, whether in Havana [2000] or Bogota [2009]?

TB: It is very interesting because I never had the conversation the way we had it today. So by looking at what we are talking about I think I am realizing something, which is not that I became provocative, it's that the art form I decided to use was complicated. Because I feel I've been accused a lot of provocation, and I don't understand that; I've been struggling a lot with that. And now I realize, talking to you, it is not that I am provoking as a provocateur, but it is more that I went back to use an art form that is problematic to interpret, because it's an open source, an open system. Why is it open? Because participation is part of what defines the work, therefore you also give responsibility to other people. So I think that is the change; I didn't know how to handle responsibility. I realized I had responsibility for my work, I took full responsibility, and then I added, no, you are also responsible. So I think that already can be seen as provocation because you are forced not to be passive in the work. But also in this open system you are forced in a way, if you want to participate, to take a stake in it, to be responsible. And also the issues—because I didn't want it to be about me or feminist or a movement—were even more intensely, let's say, power-related concepts. "*Destierro*" ["*Displacement*", 1998-1999] is a piece which is analogous; it's a reference, it's a metaphor where I appropriate something and then you have to understand—the process to understand the political implications was so long, because you have to know the reference, you have to understand I'm doing this appropriation, you have to understand the content—so I thought this is too long. So I feel like I shortened in those pieces the process of understanding the politics in the work and that also is seen as provocation. Because the *parkour* or the road that you have to walk is shorter; so it is a little more—not violent—but a little more in your face, and you have to deal with this. So I think these are—let's say to defend myself—four elements that I've used that make people react differently towards the work.

Notes

1 The article in question, "An Artist's Performance: A Year as a Poor Immigrant" by Sam Dolnick, was published on May 18, 2011 and is available here:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/19/nyregion/as-art-tania-bruguera-lives-like-a-poor-immigrant.html> (A version of this article appeared in print on May 19, 2011, on page A20 of the New York edition with the headline: "She Calls It Art. They Call It, Well, Life..")

Captions

1 IM International. Conception Year: 2006 Implementation Years: 2010 – 2015 Medium: Appropriation of Political Strategies, Useful Art Duration: Long – Term Project Materials: Immigration policies and laws, Immigrant Population, Elected Officials, Politicians, Community Organizations, Public Pressure, Media Location: Corona, Queens, New York, United States <http://immigrant-movement.us/>

2 IM International – town hall. Title: Immigrant Movement International (IM International) Location: Corona, Queens, New York, United States Conception year: 2006 Implementation years: 2010–2015 Medium: Appropriation of Political Strategies, Useful Art Duration: Long–Term project Materials: Immigration policies and laws, Immigrant Population, Elected Officials, Politicians, Community Organizations, Public Pressure, Media. Courtesy of Immigrant Movement International Photos: IM International

3 immigrant respect pin. Title: Awareness Ribbon for Immigrant Respect Campaign Year: 2011 Medium: Awareness campaign Materials: Metal pins, community meetings, letters sent to elected officials, media Design: Tania Bruguera Photo: Camilo Godoy Courtesy of Immigrant Movement International

4 Arte de Conducta – Hirschhorn, Thomas, 2007. Title: Behavior Art School (Cátedra Arte de Conducta) Conception year: 1998 Founder and Director: Tania Bruguera Implementation years: 2002-2009 Medium: Behavior Art (Arte de Conducta), Useful Art (Arte Útil) Duration: Long-term project Location: Havana, Cuba Materials: Configuration of an Institution, Education Formats, Public Gathering, Study of the Relationship Between the Performative Arts and Politics and its implementation in Society.

5 Ana Mendieta/Tania Bruguera. Title: Tribute to Ana Mendieta Exhibited at: Ana Mendieta / Tania Bruguera. Sala Polivalente, Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, Havana, Cuba (1992) Conception year: 1985 Implementation years: 1986-1996 Medium: Re-creation of works Duration: Long-Term project Materials: Ana Mendieta's artworks and unrealized projects, lectures, exhibitions, interviews, texts courtesy of Studio Bruguera photos: ©Gonzalo Vidal Alvarado

6 The Burden of Guilt 05 (HI-RES). Author: Tania Bruguera, Title: El Peso de la Culpa (The Burden of Guilt). Medium: Re-enactment of a historical event Year: 1997-1999. Materials: Decapitated lamb, rope, water, salt, Cuban soil. Dimensions: Variable. Courtesy of Studio Bruguera. Photo: Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas, Venezuela

7 Tatlin's Whisper #5 002 (HI-RES). Tania Bruguera, Tatlin's Whispers #5, 2008. Medium: Decontextualization of an action. Year: 2008. Materials: Mounted police, crowd control techniques, audience. Dimensions: Variable. Performance view at UBS Openings: Live The Living Currency, Tate Modern. Photo : Sheila Burnett. Courtesy Tate Modern

8 Untitled (havana 2000) 006 (HI-RES) (CC) (RTP). Title: Sin Título (Habana, 2000) Untitled (Havana, 2000) Medium: Video Performance – Installation Year: 2000 Materials: Milled sugar cane, black and white monitor, Cubans, DVD disc, DVD player Dimensions: 13.12' x 39.37 x 164.04' Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Casey Stoll

About Immigrant Movement International

Tania Bruguera's concept for Immigrant Movement International was inspired by the civil unrest in the suburbs of Paris in 2005 led by immigrants. The lack of real political representation for immigrants and the little respect and committed dialogue from politicians with the immigrant community inspired this project to place migrants in a position of power, whereby their political representation could be strengthened through a political party created by immigrants. The commonalities that exist between all migrants, regardless of their individual circumstances and place of origin, as well as the treatment of immigrant issues by politicians are the force behind this project.

In 2010 Tania was approached by Creative Time and the Queens Museum of Art to produce a new public art project; her proposal was Immigrant Movement International.

Immigrant Movement International (IM International) launched in March 2011 in Corona, Queens, New York. Queens is a borough known for its vibrant immigrant population, with more than 45% of the population being foreign born, and with approximately 138 languages spoken.

Tania Bruguera is one of the leading political and performance artists of her generation. Bruguera's work researches ways in which Art can be applied to the everyday political life; creating a public forum to debate ideas shown in their state of contradictions and focusing on the transformation of the condition of "viewer" onto one of "citizenry." Bruguera uses the terms ARTE DE CONDUCTA (conduct/ behavior art) and ARTE UTIL (useful art) to define her practice.

Bruguera has participated in Documenta, Performa, Venice, Gwangju and Havana Biennales, and at exhibitions at some of the most prominent museums in Europe and United States. Some of these museums include the Tate Modern, The Whitechapel Gallery, PS1, ZKM, IVAM, Kunsthalle Wien, and The New Museum of Contemporary Art. Her work is part of the collection of the Tate Modern; Museum für Moderne Kunst; Daros Foundation; Museo del Barrio; Bronx Museum; IVAM; and Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam.

A graduate of the MFA program at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (United States) and Instituto Superior de Arte (Cuba), Bruguera is also the Founder / Director of Arte de Conducta; the first politic art studies program in the world, hosted by Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana. She is visiting faculty at Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris, IUAV in Venice and Rijksakademie in Amsterdam.

Marion von Osten on her collaborative style and multiple roles interviewed by Charlotte Barnes

Charlotte Barnes: You have many roles, artist, curator, author, and professor; do you feel that you are more one than the other? Is this something that changes over time and will change in the future?

Marion von Osten: No not at all, all the roles belong together. For me, it's a need to do something and a kind of Constructivist approach. The Constructivist's historically did not divide between these positions. The Russian Constructivists designed exhibitions, made artworks, published, created posters and so on. So, it's a question of tradition, of which genealogy you insert yourself into. There is the 19th Century male genius model that is still working, but I'm not in that kind of tradition but refer to a feminist and micro-political approach. If you look at feminist art from the 70s, you find that they had to self-organize and create exhibitions. There was a need to do something. I would like to see the taking of multiple roles more as a necessity to inhabit different possible articulations in the art field. With teaching, it can also mean working together with younger practitioners and to understand the classroom as an intellectual laboratory. So yes, it's all part of the practice.

CB: In the exhibition, *Be Creative! The Creative Imperative!* at the Design Museum, Zurich (2002–2003), you were the curator as well as a contributing artist. What were the biggest challenges for you on this dual-role project? And what if any were the biggest advantages of curating your own work?

MvO: That is an interesting question because actually that is still a taboo - you can either be one or the other. This divide represents a boundary you cannot cross. Ideological boundaries are interesting for an artist to work with. In the *Be Creative!* Exhibition (2003) I did this very consciously. On the one

hand it was a collaborative process a research processes that meant working together with very different people from very different backgrounds, focusing on the issues as experts in the field.

There are a lot of problems in research when the expertise of the actors in the field are not taken seriously enough. Ethnographical studies are known to be plagued by this. So if it is about creativity, then who are the experts? I guess the artist and the designer. It was very important in this process to let them speak and I am part of them, I am not an outsider, I am not an impartial researcher - coming in and having an object to study - I'm part of the process and that made all very interesting. The research thus was militant on consciousness raising one could say. And I produced a video with all graphic and multimedia designers at Schöneeggstrasse Zurich (k3000), as an exhibition contribution. But because the exhibition was in the Design Museum nothing had to be an artwork - that was liberating - on the other hand art curators regarded the video in the exhibition as a valuable work that could be shown in an art context again, but there was no intention for it while making it. And also practitioners who were involved in *Be Creative!* were not all artists. We were collaborators who brought in material, documents or ideas, theories. And the listing of contributors in the exhibition folder is thus not equal to a list for an art show. This is very important to mention, as it is actually a political strategy and a clear strategy against this normative idea of how exhibitions are made and who the contributors to exhibitions are. It's not just the artists, it's even the technician, everybody needs to be recognised because in other forms of culture production, like film production, it is usual to credit everybody who was involved. In a Design Museum it is also very usual practice to have a the full production team named. Some are contributors

with research and artworks, and some bring documents, ideas, do the exhibition design, the installation and all are named.



CB: You worked with a large number of specialists on this project, including architects, artists, designers, cultural historians and others, with such a large collective how did you manage the hierarchy with your co-curator and how did you maintain your vision?

MvO: It's a process and the project cannot just turn off. It's not like in the art world where you are asked to have something finished in three months for the next show; it's a process over a long time. The last exhibition project: *In the Desert of Modernity and The Colonial Modern Project* (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin 2008, Les Abbatoirs, Casablanca 2009) needed seven years of work. It cannot be done fast. And you don't just collect people and put them into a fast process. The logic for doing the exhibition, *Be Creative! The Creative Imperative!* in 2003 lay with the sentiments expressed by the current Dean at the Zurich University of the Arts, who at the time claimed 'creativity' would be the main asset in the future world, and that was before the whole creative industries discourse came to Germany. The term creativity does not have the same sense in German speaking countries like it has in English speaking. In German *Kreativität* refers to home crafts, such as knitting; we did not associated it with artistic practice. Artists would not have called themselves creative, so the term was actually counter-creative, one could say.

We had a very critical approach from the start of this project as a reaction to the Dean's sentiments we were all asking what and why he was talking about creativity. So, I decided to do something at the University and found partners who were interested in that subject, too. I knew some colleagues

who were also very upset about these courses, so I gathered them together and I went to the Museum of Design in Zurich to present the idea of an exhibition on the notion of creativity. They were not against it because at that moment the school also wanted the teachers to be much more involved in exhibition making and thus it was a collaboration with the Institute for the Theory of Design and Art in Zurich and the Museum of Design, that was still based in the school. So I also used this energy of the moment. To initiate a project like this is not something which you do artificially, it's created in the moment because of a common interest. Then you have to seek out the experts, and one was Ulrich Bröckling, a Sociologist, who I had worked with before for the "Welcome to the Revolution" Symposium two years before. Another was Tom Holert, who had a fellowship at the ith (Institute for Theory of Design and Arts ZHDK) where I was working as a part time researcher as well. The group that constituted was also involved in local practices. Thus the project happened in Zurich, I lived in Zurich and it was at the University and it was about the school. And it was also using this international container of the Museum of Design to bring the discussion into the public. The exhibition got many reviews in design and architecture contexts and I really appreciated this as the content was not limited to the art world at all.

CB: This exhibition travelled to the Hochschule fur Grafik und Buchkunst, Leipzig where it was curated by Beatrice von Bismarck and Alexander Koch. Do you feel that the involvement of a new curator shifted the authorship and meaning of the exhibition?

MvO: Absolutely, the Hochschule fur Grafik und Buchkunst has a different history than the school and the Museum of Design in Zurich. In terms of its history, the Zurich school comes out of the modern movement and not out of the 19th Century Art Academy tradition. Thus, Leipzig has a different approach even that they have design departments too. In the context of Leipzig mainly new artworks were created and the exhibition space was the universities gallery. It was also pushing boundaries because there were art works that worked critically with the issue, and worked through it within the art space. One can say that the context was highly important here, and I think it brought a lot of interesting tensions for us involved from Zurich and Leipzig in working with the two contexts. When the students from Leipzig came to Zurich, they had some

pieces in the show in Zurich, and for them it was really strange to be in a Design Museum show, which does not consider everything an art work. These notions of where something begins and something ends, what it becomes, how it is perceived are interesting to engage with.



CB: The exhibition was very much a social commentary, bringing together design concepts, company mission statements and motivational tools among other things; did you see yourself as a curator displaying artefacts or an artist exposing meaning in them?

MvO: First of all I really didn't do it alone, I initiated it and lead it. But it was a group of people who were part of the production process. Peter Spillmann was part of the conceptual team, for making the exhibition. And Beatrice Bismarck and Alexander Koch should be mentioned for the Leipzig part as the main curators. In Zurich the show had chapters and a layout, which was done by the exhibition designer from the museum, and he had his own ideas. For me to make an exhibition is a constant negotiation process. There was an interim director in the Museum at that time, who was very helpful, and as he was an architect, he also had many important ideas in the realization process. He was very inspiring for the team. I already named Tom Holert and Ulrich Bröckling, but there was also Angela McRobbie from Goldsmiths College who inspired the show; so many people formed this in the end. To make such an exhibition is not just this one off gesture, it's a communicative process and it's full of negotiations, sometimes conflicts, but I think that's good because then it becomes political on a very concrete level. I'm much more an initiator and exhibition maker than just a curator. There is a moment in this process when you discover what has to be in the exhibition and what not, but that is based on the discussions and insights. You discuss and that it gets clear 'we

need to do something about the locality here, we need to do something about education system but also about Zurich and gentrification' and so on.

CB: Do you feel that in working as both curator and artist you can give a clearer display of the work's intention?

MvO: What you learn as an artist is to make exhibitions; I think that's completely forgotten. Maybe you don't learn everything you wanted, but what you learn is how to make an exhibition. I think that's absolutely crucial because art historians don't learn that during their studies. From the first minute of your education as an artist, you have to think how you would put a work on display, even for a class discussion. The publicity and the publication of the work is always a part of your practice, so there isn't a big step from this kind of practice to larger exhibition making. While studying I found out that I am fast to understand how discourses connect and what their genealogies are; I can easily read these in images and in art work. But to produce an exhibition it's maybe a collage work, it's a construction and a discourse you have to put that into space. That's interesting for me, even though I like to produce books as well, more interesting is this question of space because there will be visitors in this space and bodies will move through and perceive an exhibition. And they will perceive it not in a linear narrative. So this is why I like to do shows. I am not so into the linear way of narrating. For sure I did videos too but I always felt uncomfortable with linear way of reading.

In terms of exhibiting, it has a complete other time space. You don't know who will come and see it, and so you don't know how people will move through your space. So, that also means you don't know what they will take away from it, and I think that's very interesting in terms of exhibition making. It is its own medium and I would say that I use exhibition making as one medium in my practice.

CB: Another project that you were heavily involved in was *Transit Migration* (2002-2006), part of the bigger Projekt Migration. You are credited as artistic director, what did this title mean in practice and was it what you had anticipated?

MvO: Artistic Director is maybe a translation that is wrong for the English speaking context, me and Kathrin Rhomberg were put in charge of this large scale - state financed project - on migration that ran over three years. It was complicated because it

involved people who were critical about the German state. Germany's migration policy in the Guest Worker regime had racist implications. It was highly complicated, highly conflicting, and highly political in the making and I learnt the most I ever learned through *Projekt Migration*.

TRANSIT MIGRATION was a sub-project that was research based. Sociologists, political theorists and anthropologists based at the Frankfurt University researched the south-east borders of the EU. There was the idea to bring artistic production together with research. It was an experiment that worked out half and half. I don't think it is a problem for artists and curators to work in a trans-disciplinary way and with trans-disciplinary methods they broaden their boundaries and the involved society theory. For the sociologist and the political theorist there is something which is never fully grasped, and this is what I realised through this project. That is that knowledge is produced in the aesthetic practice itself. This knowledge is vast. Artists and curators have this practical knowledge of the production that is not expressed and acknowledged. It is also a tactical knowledge about how you move through discourse as an autodidact for example and make sense out of them for yourself and the production. And it's a social knowledge, you learn from and for each other. Academics might be, in the end, more fixed on an author position when it is about concepts and ideas. They are more fixed to their theses and this might be necessary because, if doctoral students are involved, they have to make their own theoretical position, but everything is very much formulated or pre-formulated and they are not really free in expressing their thoughts in the academic practice because of the formulas. So I understood that there is a liberation of university knowledge production needed, to enable students to think freely, to express freely, to shift subject areas even though this is not permitted, and so on.

It was an interesting experience, when it came to a final collaborative project, which was the MigMap Project, the mapping of the border and migration regime¹. It was a mapping of the political agencies and actors who are mapping migration, who are governing it. A counter-strategy to the governing of migration. The information was all gained in the research process. But the researchers would have not taken this information as a major factor, so we as cultural producers tried to change their perspectives on their research footnotes. The MigMap is thus an excess of the research that would be represented in

articles as footnotes. As all the research data that we found highly interesting as artists, would never be put in a major argument by the sociologists themselves. But for us as outsiders, this was the central information where we started to understand the border regime, how it works. We understood: Migration policies are made due to knowledge production, meetings, seminars, symposiums, conferences, EU financed research practice. So the problem of the question of representation was at the heart of the problem. So the strategy was to flip those things around and to map the mappers. We changed the perspective and make it possible to perceive the border regime differently. I think that's also an artistic strategy.

CB: As you mentioned, one project within TRANSIT MIGRATION was MigMap, which you worked on with the collective Labor k3000, there were fifteen authors to this piece; how did you avoid conflict in this working method and was a hierarchy developed? Do you feel that a collective piece can ever have equal authorship?

MvO: I wouldn't call it equal, but there is equality in all of those projects, you could say we are talking about a symbolic capital. I think the symbolic capital is mainly connected with Peter Spillmann, he was invited to do this project and he invested a lot of work. Without Peter this wouldn't have happened, and without Labor k3000 in Zurich, (the media collective that Peter and I founded), it wouldn't have happened. I think he gave the most symbolic capital, some of us gave maybe only a document and some people were only partially involved.

Maybe in other projects one could say 'there was the engagement of many people', but I think in this case it was Peter, and also Sabine Hess was very central in providing the material, but everybody is named. How the names are ranked is correct, I would say, there is no name incorrectly positioned, there is no one left behind the scenes. Peter could have, if he had been an artist in the genius tradition, claimed this as his 'participatory' art work and I guess the crucial part of our practices is that he didn't. So, I think the question has to be turned around and we have to ask 'why don't other people name all their collaborators?'

CB: When you were working on *Atelier Europa* at Kunstverein Munchen, 2004, you interviewed Brian Holmes and you said: "In Germany and Britain, with different political papers like the Schröder/Blair Paper,

but as well in managerial literature, artists' working life and diverse methods of creating meaning have been quoted for the model of an entrepreneurial self, a subject which synchronizes life and work time under the banner of economic success." And that you thought "that this quotation of the artist as a role model was very harmful for collective and critical cultural practices in the 90s." In what way was it harmful, can you elaborate on what you mean? Did you experience this in your working life and did it affect the way that you have worked subsequently?

MvO: Absolutely, in the 1990s there were many artists who started to try to understand the economic shift, neoliberalism, globalisation processes and so on; people like Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann organised the Messe 20k symposium. There were many people involved in the German speaking world - what we call the cultural left - who realised that something had to be done about Capitalism. There were, as always in leftist and in economic discourse, a lot of shortenings; but the idea that multi-tasking - which is a way of producing art in culture - could be the working model, even when expressed by a politician, does not mean that this form of practice no longer contains a liberating force. Even though things are demanded you cannot say that they are fully incorporated, but in the 1990s there was only one discourse.

I am simplifying the discourse for the sake of the argument, but the idea that capitalism is an intelligent system that could actually create working lives, and yet be incorporated into all aspects of everyday life even when there were a lot of theorists that don't even know how Capitalism became the hegemonic economic form. Economists know that you cannot say that Capitalism is a system that works in and for itself, it works only because it is about interaction, sociality, desires, subjectivities. What happened in the anti-capitalist field was that analysis as laid out in their book by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New spirit of Capitalism* (2007), that recalled the artists critique of the 1970s was than taken to describe contemporary critique on neoliberalism. Many artists had previously been part of social movements, which looked for solidarity with other temporary unregulated workers like with the Intermittens in France or the Euro May Day Action Committees.. So, what happened was that the possibility to step out into this new paradigm of collective working was now positioned against the more traditional role of the artist. A dichotomy that laid behind us, I thought. This was harmful because due to this

conservatism a lot of collectives stopped working, and classical gender roles, came back out of this argument. At the same time, things were changing, and people were governed in a different way, and it resulted in opposition.

I believe as an intellectual you need also to see the hole in the fence and not just keep on re-describing the fully working disciplinary program. Even the harshest border regimes, the harshest disciplinary program does not guarantee that it finally works as planned. Here again we can learn from feminist and micro-political approaches, because they actually looked at other aspects of life and production, not only the wage labor and formalised spheres, but also the informal and unregulated spheres. It is to understand how different spheres in our lives are connected or disconnected and that not everything is always 'Capitalism' or 'The State'. That's why I did the edit of the *In Search for the Post-capitalist Self* e-flux journal. I was upset about the limited discourses and they didn't get better over the years. But even with this editing very few people understood how important it would be to establish a Post-capitalist and Transcontinental perspective right now.

Note

1 http://www.transitmigration.org/migmap/home_credits.html

Captions

- 1 Be Creative! The Creative Imperative!
© Design Museum, Zurich
- 2 Be Creative! The Creative Imperative!
© Design Museum, Zurich
- 3 Atelier Europa © Dorothee Richter

Marion von Osten is an artist, author, researcher and exhibition maker. She is a group member of Labor k3000 Zürich/Berlin, *kleines postfordistisches Drama (kpD)* and the Center for post-colonial knowledge and culture (CPKC) Berlin. Research, exhibition and publication projects include: Model House—Mapping Transcultural Modernisms, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2010–2013; Architectures of Decolonization, *Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers*, Paris, 2011–2012; In the Desert of Modernity—Colonial Planning and After, *Casablanca*, 2009, Berlin, 2008; Projekt Migration, Cologne, 2002–2006; and TRANSIT MIGRATION, Zürich, Frankfurt 2003–2005. Atelier Europa, München 2004, Be Creative! The Creative Imperative, Zurich, 2003 a.o.

Since 2013 she is a PhD candidate in Fine Arts at Malmoe Academy of Fine Arts and visiting professor at CCC Master, HEAD Geneva, the Center for Curatorial Studies Bard College, New York and the Master for Arts in Public Spheres (MAPS), HSLU Lucerne. From 2006 - 2012 she was Professor for Art and Communication at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Vienna. From 1999 -2006 a Professor for Artistic Practice and researcher at the Institute for the Theory of Art and Design (ith), Zürich University of the Arts. From 1996 -1999 she was curator at Shedhalle Zürich. Von Osten lives and works in Berlin.



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Publisher

Dorothee Richter

Co-Publishers

Michael Birchall, Silvia Simoncelli

Editor

Michael Birchall

Foreword

Winfried Stürzl

Contributors

Fucking Good Art, Ute Meta Bauer, Michael Birchall, Tania Bruguera, Raqs Media Collective, Yvonne P. Doderer, Mary Jane Jacob, Marc James Léger, Kristina Lee Podesva, Dorothee Richter, Valerie Smith, Winfried Stürzl, Marion von Osten, Gavin Wade, Artur Zmijewski.

Interviews conducted by

Michael Birchall & Nkule Mabaso, Charlotte Barnes, Annemarie Brand & Monika Molnár, John Canciani & Jacqueline Falk, Sheena Greene, Anne Koskiluoma & Anna Krystyna Trzaska, Chloé Nicolet-Dit-Félix & Gülru Vardar, Ashraf Osman & Daniela N. Fuentes, Sophia Ribeiro, Tanja Trampe & Monika Molnár.

Translation

Lucinda Rennison & Mark Kyburz

Proofreading & Editorial Assistance

Nkule Mabaso

Web and Graphic Design Concept

Ronald Kolb & Volker Schartner, Biotop 3000

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Biotop 3000

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ONCURATING.org
Hafnerstr. 31
8005 Zürich
info@oncurating.org
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