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 crossed[4]. 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 may different registers, to me, it is also the critical questioning and the search of alternative order that I'm interested in.
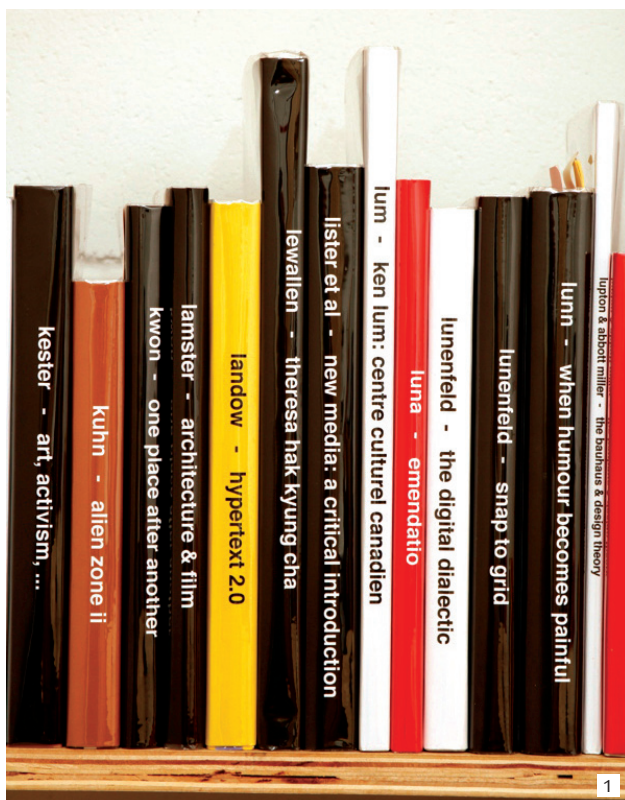
SR: In 2007 you wrote the essay "A Pedagogical Turn: Brief Notes on Education as Art" for *Fillip*, the contemporary art magazine from Vancouver, Canada for which you still work as editor. In the essay you make reference to one of the main participatory art contributors, the German artist Joseph Beuys, 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 2012[8]. 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.

6 Joseph Beuys cited in 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.

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 Fran-
cisco-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.