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 exchange. 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.” 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.
Kristina Lee Podesva  On Artistic and Curatorial Authorship

artist address a larger public without becoming sim-
undefined group of participants? How might the
work include not only friends and peers, but also an
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Public School
manage. The
template (http://thepub-
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colourschool colour) has created such a framework.

According to Rudolf Frieling, “can an art-
work include not only friends and peers, but also an
undefined group of participants? How might the
artist address a larger public without becoming sim-
plistic, didactic, or compromised?" 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. In which
ways have you succeeded to address to an ‘all’ encom-
passing public?

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
had regular attendees, but at other times
colourschool had our 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 identi-
ties 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.

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

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 colouredschool 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 some-
thing 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 colouredschool
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.

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

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 sepa-
rate. 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.

KL: 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.”

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?

KL: 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. 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**


**Captions**

1. *colourschool library*, 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.