

# bootprint



Issue Number 2

a publication dedicated to contemporary art



# Contributors

## Dan Cameron

Guest contributor  
*MFA Road Show*  
New York, NY, United States

Dan Cameron is Director of U.S. Biennial, Inc, a non-profit arts organization created to produce *Prospect New Orleans*, an international contemporary art biennial scheduled to open at multiple sites throughout the city in October 2008, and which he will curate. As of May 2007, he is also Director of Visual Art for the Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) in New Orleans, which will serve as one of the main venues for *Prospect New Orleans*. In January 2007 he will open *Something from Nothing*, his first CAC exhibition, in which twelve international artists are invited to develop works primarily using social networks and found materials.

From 1995 to 2006, Dan Cameron was Senior Curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, where he organized one-person exhibitions of, among others, William Kentridge, Paul McCarthy, Rivane Neuenschwander, Francesco Vezzoli, Cildo Meireles, Nalini Malani, Faith Ringgold, Pierre et Gilles, Doris Salcedo, Carolee Schneemann, Carroll Dunham, Los Carpinteros, David Wojnarowicz, and Martin Wong, along with such group exhibitions as *Living Inside the Grid and East Village USA*.

A specialist in global art, Cameron served as curator for the 8th Istanbul Biennial in 2003, and the Tapei 2006 Biennial. He has also organized international contemporary art exhibitions for museums and cultural organizations throughout the world, including in Austria, Brazil, China, Ireland, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, Russia, and Sweden. He is currently organizing survey exhibitions of Peter Saul's paintings for Orange County Museum of Art, and of Lee Bul's sculptural installations for an international museum consortium. In addition, since 2002 he has organized the visual arts component for the annual Next Wave Festival at Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM).

A frequent essayist for museum and trade publications on contemporary art, Cameron's most recent publications include an exhibition catalog essay on Cai Guo-Qiang for the Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin (Aug 06), a fictional memoir for a book based on the work of Stephen Dean (Sept 06), a survey essay on Miguel Palma's work for *Culturgest*, Lisboa (May 07), and a catalog text on Tony Feher (Jun 07) for the Corpus Christi Museum of Art.

Cameron teaches critical theory as a member of the graduate faculty of the School of Visual Arts' MFA program, and at New York University's Steinhardt School of Education.

## Juozas Cernius

*The Nth dimension*  
New York, NY, United States

Born in Canada, in 1976, Juozas Cernius lives and works in New York City. He received his BFA from Concordia University in Montreal (2002), and MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2004). He works with a wide range of media including drawing, painting, photography, printmaking and sculpture. Thematically, he explores oppositional and contradictory aspects of human nature and culture, including the tropes of life and death. Cernius recently exhibited a large site specific sculpture entitled *god is great/ god was great* at the DUMBO art center's *Art Under the Bridge Festival* in Brooklyn, NY (Sept. 2007). He will be exhibiting at Allen Gallery in New York City, in early 2008.

## Isil Egrikavuk

*"If this exhibition doesn't wake them up, it is not my fault!"*  
Chicago, IL, United States/  
Istanbul, Turkey

Isil Egrikavuk, born in 1980, Izmit, Turkey. Currently she is working towards her MFA at The School of The Art Institute of Chicago. Selected Performances & Exhibitions: Chicago Cultural Center, Karsi Sanat-Istanbul, Aksanat-Istanbul, PIST///-Istanbul, Museum of Contemporary Art-Chicago, Boots Contemporary Art Space-St. Louis, 3 Arts Club, Peter Jones Gallery, Links Hall, Gallery 2-Chicago, Chicago Art Department.

## Beate Engl

Guest contributor  
*Marketing alternative strategies: The New Model of Artist-Run Spaces in Berlin*  
Munich, Germany

Born in 1973 in Regen, Germany, Beate Engl studied Fine Art / Sculpture at Munich Art Academy (Akademie der Bildenden Künste) and made her diploma in the master class (Meisterschülerin) of Prof. Olaf Metzler in 2001. She received her degree as Master of Fine Arts after a joint master class from Bauhaus University Weimar and the School of the Arts Institute Chicago (MFA Public Art 2004). Besides working as a curator or in collaboration with artists and art historians (*Galerie Goldankauf* 1999-2001; *KunstPraxis* in-house-project for Siemens Arts Program 2003-2005, *The Domain of the Great Bear* at Kunstraum munich 2006/2007) her artistic practice developed towards site-specific installations and institutional criticism (*Betaversion 2.0*, Hall 14 / Federkiel Foundation, Leipzig, 2004; *Und die weiße Zelle schwebt weiter... [And the white cube keeps floating...]*, Hamburger Kunsthalle, 2005; *Mad as hell*, Ortstermine Munich, 2006; *Perfect World*, Boots Contemporary Art Space, St. Louis, 2007). In her publication *Space is a Place. Handbuch und Standortrecherche [Handbook and site research]* (Verlag Silke Schreiber 2005) she critically confronts outer space as a possible site for the expanded art world with her research about public space and globalized art industry. The artist currently lives and works in Munich. Weblink: <http://www.beateengl.de>

## Wyatt Arden Kahn

Guest contributor  
*Art and Entertainment*  
New York, NY, United States

Wyatt Arden Kahn is an artist living and working in New York City. Originally from New York, he received a BFA in Sculpture from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He was one of the founders of the Plaines Project, Chicago and was a resident summer curator at Alogon, Chicago. He also participated in the LoBot residency program in Oakland, CA. His works have been exhibited in Chicago, New York, Oakland, Prague and Berlin and he has curated shows in Chicago, New York and Jerusalem. He finds writing to be an essential element to the production of his artwork. This is his first published work.

## Erin Riley-Lopez

Guest Contributor  
*Here and Elsewhere*  
New York, NY, United States

Erin Riley-Lopez B.A., Sarah Lawrence College; M.A. Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College; Assistant Curator, The Bronx Museum of the Arts (January 2006-present); Curator, *Here and Elsewhere* Twenty-Seventh Annual Artist in the Marketplace Exhibition, The Bronx Museum of the Arts (2007); Co-curator, *AIM 26*, The Bronx Museum of the Arts (2006); Curator, *When Living Was Labor*, The Bronx Museum of the Arts (2005); Publications include catalogue essays in *Here and Elsewhere*, *AIM 26*, and *Collection Remixed*, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, and reviews of museum exhibitions have appeared in the on-line publication *might be good...* a project of fluent ~ collaborative, Austin, Texas.

## Serkan Özkaya

Guest contributor  
*Rhythm and Symbol*  
Istanbul, Turkey

Serkan Özkaya was born in Istanbul, Turkey in 1973, lives and works in Istanbul. His solo shows in the last two years include *Bring me the Head of...* at *m* on the Bund, Shanghai and Freemans, NYC (2007); *When He Came Back to His Senses*, *The Monster Was Still Waiting in Front of the Cave* at Galerist, Istanbul (2006); *Monet: A Retrospective* at Kuenstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2006). Between 2003-2006 Özkaya produced his work *Today Could Be a Day of Historical Importance* in collaboration with three newspapers (*Radikal* in Turkey, *Aftonbladet* in Sweden, *Freitag* in Germany and the *New York Times*)

## Daniel Tucker

Guest contributor  
*Proximity to Politics: A Review of Three Recent Published Dialogues on Contemporary Art and Activism*  
Chicago, IL, United States

Daniel Tucker works as an organizer in Chicago, focused primarily on public space, social movement history and geography. He is currently the editor of the biannual journal and public program series AREA Chicago Art/Research/Education/Activism ([areachicago.org](http://areachicago.org)). For more information see [miscprojects.com](http://miscprojects.com)

# Boot Print

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This time around, Boot Print is going after its ideal structure, its vision. My goal is to put a publication out there for as long as the Boot Print team and I have something to say. I've often caught myself stating to my fellow Booties, that "I've got at least 10 issues in me," with Tim's help of course, and Juan's and Bryan's and Joe's. With this in mind, I'd like to share with you my thoughts on the skeleton of Boot Print, because it will help you follow us, and hopefully inspire you to contribute to the broader discussion of the publication in ways you can. To remain faithful to our goals, it is very important to outline a structure as we go along that will offer focused critical conversation with room for flexibility in an adaptable format. That format will continue to include:

- a) Boots exhibitions and projects
- b) A study section for in-depth conversation
- c) A first translation into English
- d) A selection of articles and interviews on a thematic thread
- e) A book review

## Note from Georgia Kotretsos

What you'll be reading in the following pages is the product of 5 key factors that allow Tim, Juan, Bryan, Juozas and I to work together, taking first for granted that wherever our computers are, the Boot Print headquarters follow: DSL Internet access, Gmail, Gtalk, Skype, and Cyberduck. It's a remarkably rewarding experience, and for that I want to thank, on behalf of my crew, our advertisers, the Boot Print Friends and especially Nancy and Kenneth Kranzberg, as well as Michael and Peggy Ridlen, and the silent partners of Boots for supporting us and making this experience possible for us.

My best wishes for his future endeavors go to Paul Nordmann, who religiously documented the Boots exhibitions and events for one solid year. The majority of the images you see on our website are through Paul's lens and I personally thank him for his commitment. Enjoy grad-school!

Issue 2 covers the Boots exhibitions; discusses Independent curatorial practice with Dana Turkovic, Jan van Woensel, Elpida Karaba, Cecilia Canziani, Sotirios Bahtsetzis and Abedallah Karroum; looks at different fields that intersect with art, or vice versa; features artists, and finally Serkan Ozkaya's selection, an extract of "Estetic" by Afsar Timucin, for translation into English from Turkish.

The emails we receive expressing your interest and your support have been extremely valuable to all of us. I'm encouraging you to get involved in Boot Print by simply continuing to be involved in art.

I'll be looking forward to hearing from all of you again. **BP**

Why shouldn't artists retreat to their studio, board themselves up and hammer out idea after idea until something brilliant hits them over the head? This sounds like an attractive method. It's easy to work in a discipline and progress strictly within those parameters, but the challenge of working on any creative problem is making something that can't be ignored across disciplines. Working on this second issue of Boot Print has been a challenge for our team of contributors — and that's the fun part — a challenge to make connections between ideas, locations, and practices to prove and disprove what is possible.

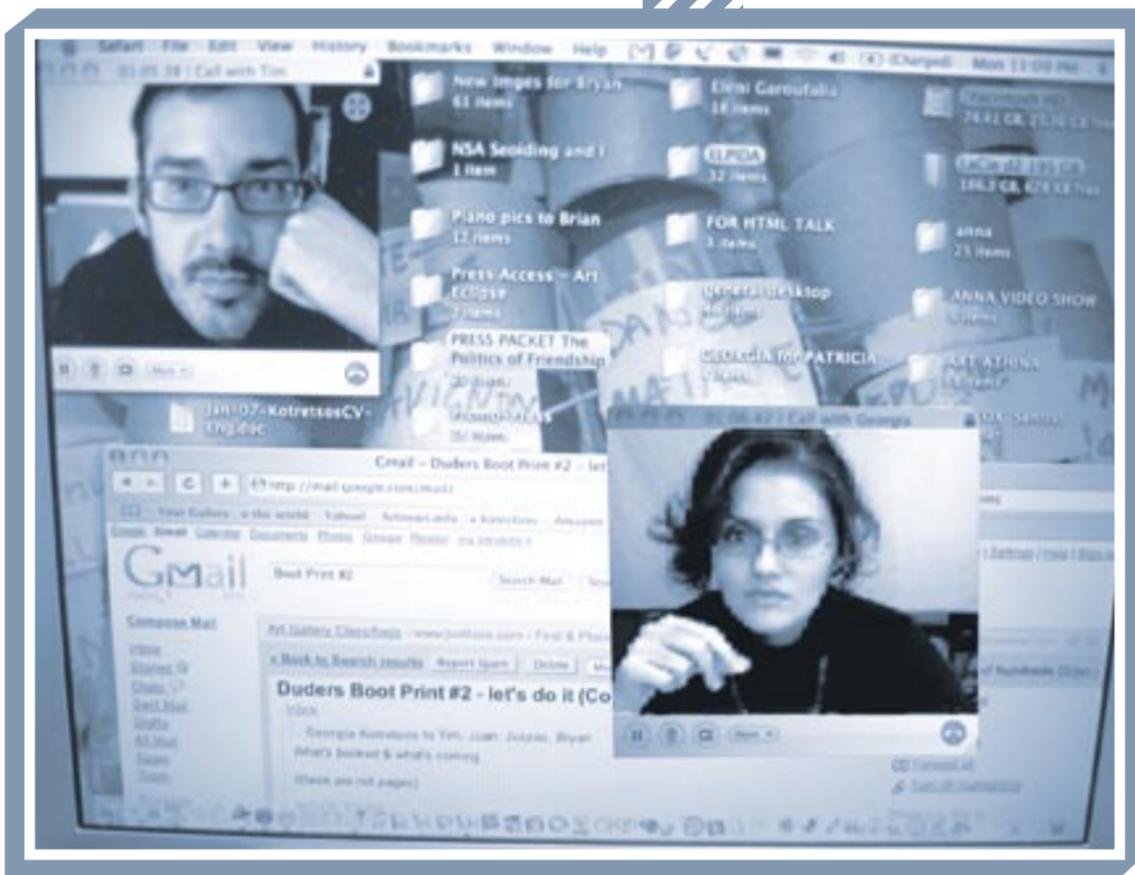
This issue of Boot Print features a section of articles that, while in the making, was referred to as "art and something else," but the idea was strictly about making connections, looking for

how different methods

and ideas — activism, entertainment, economics, music, cinema — can be applied to the structures of visual arts, and whether or not they should be.

Unlike the first issue of Boot Print, this second issue was edited over many emails, instant message conversations, and webcam meetings between Georgia in Athens and me in Chicago. We have been able to contact each other, and many others in different places at various times zones, with the questions that haunt us most. Focusing on one type of cultural producer, the independent curator, has taken our desire for critical conversation to a point of acute examination. I hope the words of the up and coming generations find their place in the conversation around curatorial practice. As a team of young unknowns, facilitating that conversation is the best and most noteworthy thing I can think to offer. I am grateful to everyone who returns our calls. **BP**

## Note from Tim Ridlen



# Note from Juan William Chávez

director of Boots Contemporary Art Space

To be honest about our first year, it was work back-to-back non-stop, and we rose to the challenge. We were able to raise funds to complete our first year's exhibition line up, publish and distribute our first issue of *Boot Print*, and extend our network of artists and curators. Our second International Artist in Residence, Beate Engle (Germany), brought challenging insight to St. Louis history and the local entrepreneur King C. Gillette. Our first exhibition of local artists, *Slinger*, was such a great success that we decided to make it an annual tradition—to end each season with a *Slinger*. After receiving a *Boot Print*, Dan Cameron and recent SVA graduates proposed the *MFA Road Show*, a project that was right up our alley. The School of Visual Arts *MFA Road Show* turned out to be a stimulating collaboration that demonstrated the importance of our mission as an artist-run space and network of artists. *Here and Elsewhere*, a curated group exhibition and video screening series that explored landscapes, geography, and location, from Chicago-based artists ended the year with a BANG! The exhibition led to a collaboration with "Artists In The Market Place" participants at the Bronx Museum of the Arts and their exhibition also entitled *Here and Elsewhere*. The collaboration consisted of a video station of A.I.M. artists at Boots, and a panel discussion entitled *A Tale of Three Cities: New York, Chicago, and St. Louis* at the Bronx Museum of the Arts. Erin Riley-Lopez, Assistant Curator, was a grand host and helped us paint the town red.

Artist run.  
Artist funded.

Behind the scenes, Boots played host to a few notable art-tourists passing through. Charles Esche, Director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (NL), Kerstin Niemann, guest curator and founder of the project platform "FILTER", and artist, Otto Berchem, stopped by on their Heartland Research Trip. After spending hours in a car we welcomed them along with local St. Louis artists and curators. Nato Thompson, in town for a lecture at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, also came by for conversation and celebratory drinks. Boots was honored to extend our hospitality and enjoyed the dialog.ue.

Boots' first year was artist-run and artist-funded, we baited our ideas and cast off into the abyss. By the end of the year we began seeing positive results and responses coming back from the abyss, reinforcing our mission — a space that functions with a network of artists living locally, nationally, and internationally coming together to produce exhibitions and a publication. Working in this manner creates a dialogue with others, extending the network, allowing us to cross borders and collaborate with artists, curators, writers and others that live beyond geographic boundaries. Boots has applied for nonprofit 501(c)3 status, so we are now eligible for donations and grants to expand programming, exhibitions and this publication, all in the effort to create conversations, raise new questions, and find alternative modes of production. **BP**

## Pedestrian Project

by Juan William Chávez

Back in the day there were so many people walking down Cherokee Street that you couldn't find space on the sidewalk—people shopping, making trips to the market, talking one on one to store owners or going to the picture show for a taste of the cinema. The stretch of roads that make up Antique Row where Boots sits was designed and laid for the public to congregate and socialize. It was real city living, made for the traffic of pedestrians. Like all areas of the city, Antique Row had its peak and then slowly crept into the depths of disregard. Now the area is getting a second chance and once again people are walking up and down the streets in the return of the pedestrian and the village style.

The Pedestrian Project was initiated as a result of the *Boot Print* crunch time. That is the time when the Boots team is busy editing, designing, fundraising, and doing everything else it takes to make sure we successfully go to print. We all have to pitch in to raise the barn, so to speak, and this requires time and space for each of us to do our part. During the month of January, the gallery was transformed into the *Boot Print* Headquarters. Locked inside, and knowing the gallery could take care of itself, we had a base of operations well-guarded from distraction. Out of necessity and the thrill of a creative challenge, we created the Pedestrian Project to keep our viewers at bay, but not underwhelmed.

Taking into consideration the history of Cherokee Street, and taking advantage of the storefront windows, we decided to find an artist that could transform the window into a public project for the passersby. Given an audience that's on the go, this is a challenge to the artist to step outside of the white box. Artist Mike Schuh kicked off the series. As the co-founder of Fort Gondo Compound for the Arts, Schuh along with Galen Gondolfini and others were the first to jumpstart the neighborhood come back. Schuh had a history with the neighborhood and a good understanding of the people that lived there.

Armed with an outdoor loud speaker and some cardboard, Schuh explains, "The piece, in its most basic form, is intended to attract an audience of passers-by who may otherwise walk past the gallery without giving it a glance. While accomplishing that it also makes the viewer inherently aware of their lack of access to the closed gallery. It is this relationship, one of attraction and repulsion, that becomes the focus of this project.



Mike Schuh  
Untitled, 2006  
cardboard, black paint, CD, loudspeaker

photo: Boots

"As one nears the gallery a male voice is heard. It's looped and playing through a speaker above the door. The voice calls out softly, hesitantly, 'Hey. Hey you. Come here.' Phrases and greetings of this nature are repeated and always followed by an oppositional statement like, 'Never mind. Just keep walking.' The voice invites you to approach, to come closer, and then rejects you."

"Through its hesitant tone and repetition of calls and dismissals it suggests that even though you are being told to 'keep moving' this voice seems to actually want you. Likewise, though the message painted on the cardboard belligerently repels the viewer, one can't help but be attracted to what might be on the other side (especially with the few slim seams between some of the cardboard sheets to tempt you). To some degree we always want what we can't have, even if that means simply satisfying one's curiosity about what it is that they are being restricted from. Through the application of these contradictory characteristics, the audience is provided with a critical launching point for considering their relationship to public and private spaces as well as what causes them to be attracted to something. How is it that an individual decides what they want to be a part of? What do we ignore, what do we engage and how do we arrive at those decisions?"

Of all our projects in the last year, Mike Schuh's work triggered a plethora of responses, ranging from those that were not happy to be told there was nothing to see, to those that sat and enjoyed a conversation with the building.

Mike Schuh has been a key artist in St. Louis and has had a positive influence in the growth and development of contemporary art here. Since then, Schuh has moved to Chicago for the MFA program at University of Chicago. All of us at Boots wish him the best of success. **BP**

# A Perfect World

by Tim Ridlen



The work of this year's International Artist-in-Residence at Boots is an incredibly poignant inquiry tailored to a local history of which most locals aren't even aware. Also relevant, however, to the artist's home, Germany, is the larger context of the current state of liberal capitalism and utopian dreams. Thus the whole idea of an international artist-in-residence seems valorized, making new connections, adding different voices to the city, and gaining a larger perspective.

"A Perfect World" can be seen as a site-specific experiment that consists of different parts / bodies of work and historical or fictional source material. As in former works, Beate Engl developed the concept on-site following a string of interesting historical, political or social facts about St. Louis that were then connected to more general themes. While researching the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, its overall theme of the "ideal citizen" and the impact of technological utopias around the turn of the century, Beate Engl found a 1894 diagram by businessman and utopian technocrat King Camp Gillette, which outlines the human drift towards a better future. Gillette's idea of the world as a people's corporation and his notion of progress depends on order, organization, intelligence and discipline. Drawn on the wall of the gallery this image becomes the starting point of the installation as it divides the exhibition space in two parts: the "sea of competition for material wealth," an unruly, individualist struggle that leads the viewer through a narrow channel of adversity to the "sea of progress," where science and the arts make up the key elements of the better world.

Gillette describes the image best himself. Sea of competition for material wealth: "We see every individual the pilot of his own craft. Selfishness is the power that propels him forward and the whole sea is choked with the wrecks of unfortunate humanity." Sea of progress: "Above, we see the ships of progress guided by the power of united intelligence. Each individual embarks on the craft where inclination leads him and combines his intelligence with others to urge the ship forward."<sup>1</sup> At the same time he published these writings—his books were displayed in the gallery's window—Gillette became famous and rich through his invention of the disposable razor blade. Being both self-made-inventor-entrepreneur and socialist utopian call-

ing for anti-capitalist revolution seems fascinating and strange at the same time. Gillette's utopia envisions the world as a gigantic, joint stock company that would take over the world's production and distribution of all goods and services and be governed by the people — each stockholder having one vote. This corporation would take care of the necessities of life "by the people — for the people" with "the combined strength, wealth, and intelligence of the people [as] opposed to individual divided interests."

Engl questions the humanistic utopia of this idealistic model of "a perfect civilization" through different artistic gestures in the exhibition space: The wall drawing of "The Human Drift" is followed by a small booklet with illustrations from the 1904 World's Fair in which the artist painted with graphite over the spectacular buildings and inventions leaving only the people. Through emphasizing these imaginary visitors of the Fair in their different appearances—with clothes recognizably international (Indian, German, English), people in uniforms, in wheelchairs, etc. — the artist tries to define the proclaimed "ideal citizen." Another gesture in the exhibition space jumps forward to the 1970s: In "The narrows" — set amid the two exhibition spaces — a loudspeaker plays a speech from the film "Network" (1976). Arthur Jensen (Ned Beatty as the head of the Union Broad Casting System) intensely indoctrinates the newscaster Howard Beale (Peter Finch) with his world system that is exclusively based on currency: "The world is a business, Mr. Beale."

"Am I getting through to you, Mr. Beale? You get up on your little twenty-one inch screen and howl about America and democracy. There is no America. There is no democracy. There is only IBM, and ITT, and AT and T, and DuPont, Dow, Union Carbide, and Exxon - those are the nations of the world today. What do you think the Russians talk about in their councils of state — Karl Marx? They get out their linear programming charts, statistical decision theories and mini-max solutions and compute the price-cost probabilities of their transactions and investments just like we do. We no longer live in a world of nations and ideologies, Mr. Beale. The world is a college of corporations, inexorably determined by the immutable by-laws of business. The world is a business, Mr. Beale. It has been since

man crawled out of the slime, and our children will live, Mr. Beale, to see that perfect world in which there's no war or famine, oppression or brutality. One vast and ecumenical holding company, for whom all men will work to serve a common profit, in which all men will hold a share of stock, all necessities provided, all anxieties tranquilized, all boredom amused."<sup>2</sup>

The similarities to Gillette's vision are striking...

Engl adds another part to the conceptual display with a performance she documented in front of the gallery during her residency at Boots.

The performers spelled out the letters "W-O-R-L-D" and "O-R-D-E-R" with grey ponchos attached to one another. A video shot from the roof shows in time lapse the whole process of posting a message letter by letter in public space. They make physically palpable the gap between connected individuals and the system of world order they are illustrating.

At the very end of the exhibition space is a small box-like room that functions as a "think tank," a room only for heads. To enter the room, the viewer simply penetrates one of nine ponchos sewn together at shoulder height. By popping ones head through the neck hole, the audience dives into a surreal white cube isolated from the rest of the gallery and accompanied only by the heads of others. This final intellectual retreat opens up the strict order of the world system towards a collective meeting room in which people come face-to-face or head-to-head, forced to interact. No longer a carrier of political or social opinion, it seems as if you have entered "the brain" and the rest is just a "sea of flailing limbs." King Camp Gillette would be proud. **BP**

<sup>1</sup> King Camp Gillette: The Human Drift, 1894.

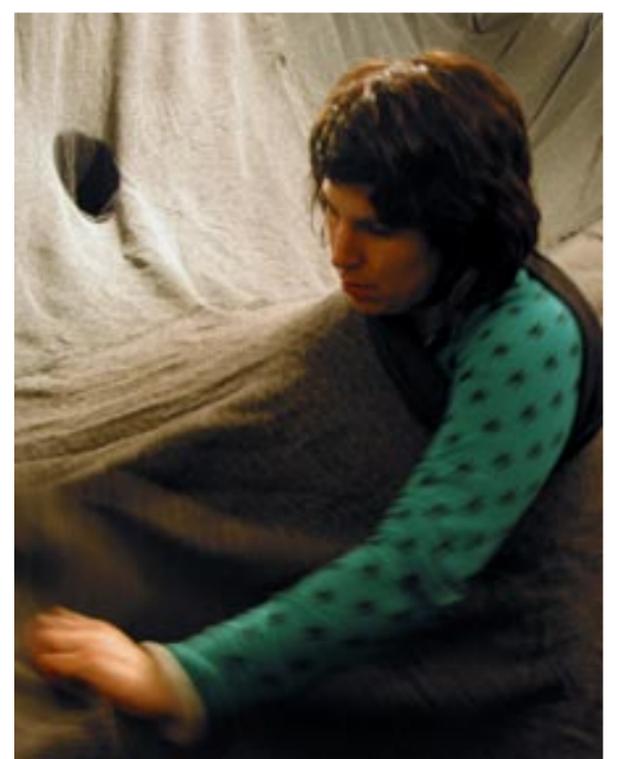
<sup>2</sup> Speech from the film Network, 1976 directed by Sydney Lumet (Ned Beatty as Arthur Jensen).



installation view



photo shoot from Boots' roof



Beate at work

# Slinger

by Juan William Chávez



above: installation view of the exhibition

We started off the Boots exhibition year with *The Politics of Friendship* to demonstrate the simple formula of friends coming together and starting an artist-run space. The exhibition also set the tone for our philosophy and furthered our mission of bringing artists together from all over the world. In many ways, this was like the beginning of a typical night out: many introductions and much enthusiasm for the adventure ahead. In typical St. Louis fashion, we ended the night with a slinger. What the hell is a slinger?

Former St. Louis resident, Katie Pelech, penned this allegorical explanation:

"It's 3 am, the lights are coming on and you're closing down a bar for the second time tonight. You and a group of you friends stumbling out on to a sidewalk somewhere in the city, you're laughing a bit too hard and you're not ready to go home. One of your friends suggests you grab some food, and you realize you're starving. So you cajole whoever's done the best impression of a teetotaler into driving you and three or four of your nearest and dearest to the diner. You wander in and collectively flop into a booth, flipping through menus even though, let's face it, you know what you want. The waitress comes over, drops a pitcher of water on the table and takes orders, scrawling them deftly on a pad while still managing to convey her complete and utter disdain. You don't care, you're talking with your friends, sitting in this booth, it's loud and dingy and glaringly fluorescent and all of a sudden it's so good. You're with the people who know you so well that it's effortless, your stomach hurts from laughing and you're more relaxed than you've been all week. You're smack-dab in the middle of an argument about whether hippopotamuses are deadlier than polar bears and, if so, should canoeing be considered an extreme sport, when suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, it materializes, a plate clattering down hard on the table.

It's beautiful. It's a hamburger patty topped with eggs, bundled up in oil-browned hash browns, smothered in chili, coated in grated cheddar and sprinkled with onions. Its rich, greasy aroma mingles with that of the hops

on your breath as you inhale deeply, gazing in admiration as the cheese begins to take on a shiny stringiness as it melts. You pick up your fork and cobble together what remains of your mental powers, trying hard to spear a little bit of each part in every bite. Fork to mouth, fork to mouth and it's gone before you know it, and only then do you raise your head and look around you. You know this place, you know these people and you know that glassy look of contentment in their eyes, because it's the mirror image of your own. It's St. Louis, it's satisfaction and it's sustenance – it's the slinger."

Slinger was the exhibition in which Boots attempted to explore, analyze, and question what it means to be an artist, critic, and/or curator living and working in St. Louis. This exhibition was a survey of artists that Boots has come to know in the St. Louis community. This was our moment to look closely at our situation. Is there a St. Louis aesthetic? Is there a collective movement, or are we a group of individuals? What are the issues our artists are dealing with? What is conveying our themes and ideas?

Each artist took full advantage of the art-lab setting. Matt Strauss, artist and director of White Flag Projects, is known for his large silkscreen images, but here he produced an interactive sculpture. Boots agent and artist Bryan Reckamp usually paints on large boxy canvases, but here produced a punching bag that doubled as a body bag. Painter Brandon Anschutz surprised us with a subtle wooden floor piece. Self-trained photographer Ryan Hess had a video portrait of Mike McKinley, a carpenter coming home from work and indulging in a daily ritual that mostly entails drinking whiskey and smoking pot. With these pieces among many other great works, this exhibition was a great start to what will be a yearly tradition.

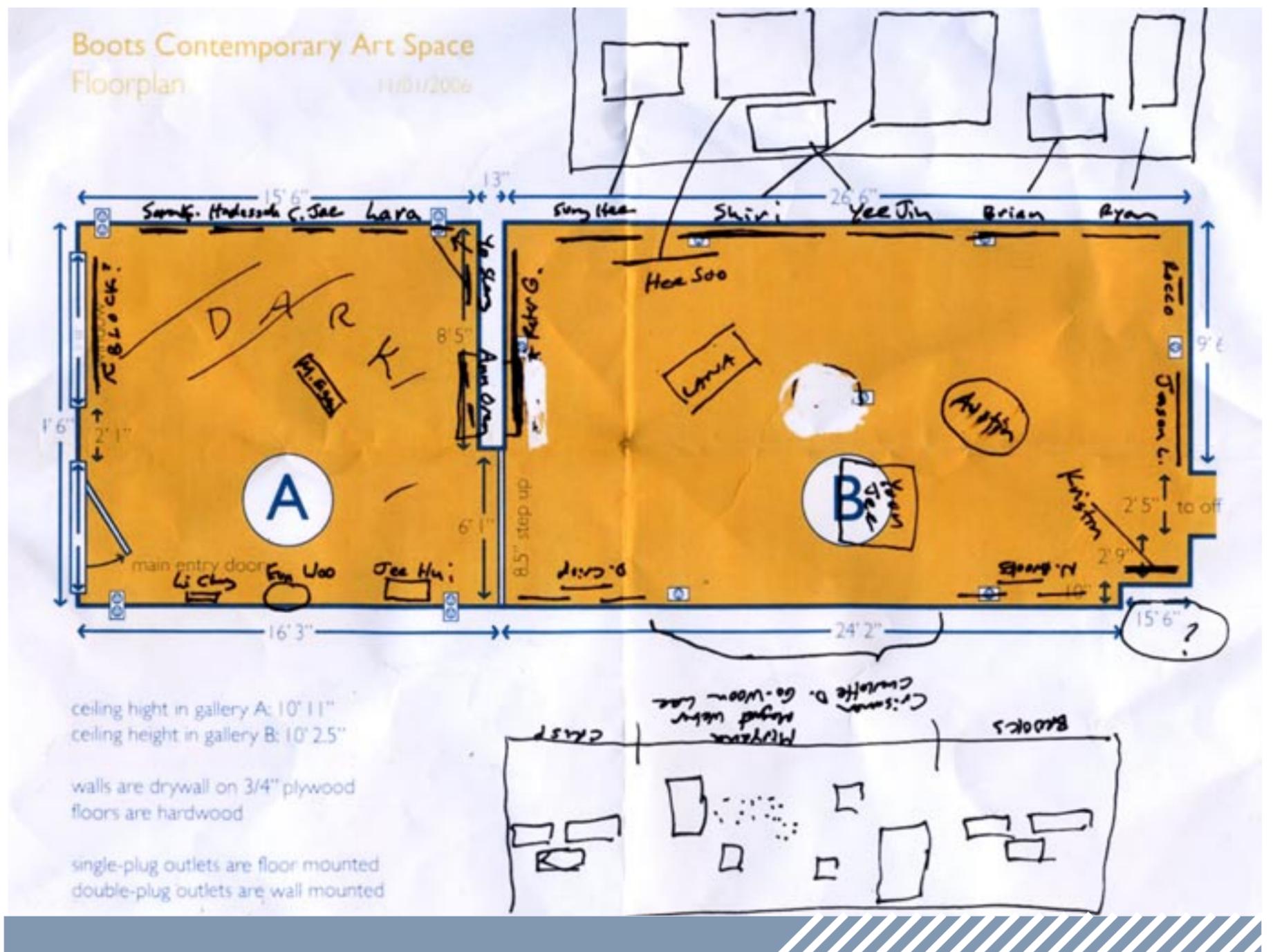
**Featuring work by:** Brandon Anschutz, Robin Assner, Sarah Colb, Andrea Green, Ryan Hess, Jamie Kreher, Jason Wednesday Miller, Peter Pranschke, Bryan Reckamp, Tim Ridlen, Mike Schuh, stripper:pilot, Matthew Strauss, Brett Williams, and Paul Zografakis **BP**



above: exhibition announcement featuring the namesake dish

# MFA Road Show

by Dan Cameron



Above: Show layout sketch by Dan Cameron for the Boots installment of the MFA Road Show

One of the best reasons for somebody like myself to get involved with the education of artists is that it enables me to create an experimental classroom environment in which I can put to a kind of test the question of whether or not the things I believe to be true at any point in time are, in fact, still viable. It is far from an infallible process, of course, but there is something about standing in front of more than two dozen young adults, who are temporarily linked by nothing more substantive than the shared hunger to be a successful artist in New York City, that makes it difficult to fall back on easy platitudes about pursuing your dreams no matter what happens. You cannot hope to win over such a group by merely repeating formulas that have worked well in the past. It either has to be true right then, in the moment when you are saying it, or your credibility starts to seem shaky to those present, yourself included. Mere assertion, even when backed up by the force of a colorful personality, is no substitute for a real trying out of one's pet hypotheses in real time.

Because the course I teach at School of Visual Arts is described as a seminar, in which readings and discussions play a central role, it is often productive to let these discussions take their own course, giving them a nudge here and there but essentially letting the students' own concerns serve as a guide to what gets discussed and how. And because the seminar takes place during the 4th and last semester in a two-year MFA program, these concerns often take the form of career anxieties about how the students' own aspirations might be made to dovetail with whatever the art world is validating (or not) at that particular moment. Since my focus tends to be on critical thinking, I frequently find myself in rhetorical push-back mode, continually challenging students' perceptions of how the art world functions and where their limits lie.

Following a year in which the 2006 Fine Arts MFA recipients at SVA had maneuvered a situation in which I, as their teacher, selected and installed an end-of-term show that lasted nearly a week in early June at David Zwirner Gallery, it was understandable that an elephant filled the room a few weeks into this year's class. The question was soon on the table: if last year's class got to have their end-of-year show at one of the most prestigious galleries in New York, then what was this year's class going to do? I reminded them that the 2006 Zwirner show was a lucky break, owing greatly to the particular personalities and circumstances involved. In short, they were free to do what they wanted to do, or to do nothing at all, and it would be fine. If, however, they wanted me to get involved, the one stipulation I had was that we come up with a completely different approach, since the Chelsea-gallery template would harden far too quickly, and afterward I would never be able to dispel the impression that mine was the class that ended with a show in a big commercial gallery. Such an impression would, in fact, be the exact opposite of the message I had wanted to convey in the first place.

My argument did not go over that well, but the original impulse behind the class' intentions didn't exactly die a quick death, either. After a week of deliberations, I was approached by Jason Losh, who said he had spoken with several members of the class, who seemed to be in favor of an exhibition that somehow engaged the heartland of the U.S. As we talked it over, the basic shape emerged: we would target 12 or 15 contemporary museums, alternative spaces, and even com-

mercial galleries in a number of regional cities, and see if we could come up with an itinerary that would give us one, two, or even three venues in cities that were close enough that a rental truck could be readily driven between them with the art on board. These names mostly came from me, as did the initial letter of approach, and Jason agreed to take care of the logistics regarding budget, transport and travel.

The initial letters went out to prospective venues the first week of March 2007, but it wasn't until a second group of letters was sent a couple of weeks later that the pieces of the puzzle began to emerge: Finesilver Gallery, in San Antonio, was interested in coordinating the exhibition with a mid-July opening in their main space; and Boots Contemporary Art Space, a fairly new alternative space in St. Louis, were able to present it a few weeks earlier. The latter approach had been especially serendipitous, because although I didn't know the space or staff personally, I had been impressed with a copy of the magazine, figured they were kindred spirits to the idea we had hatched, and approached them cold.

What made the whole undertaking more important for me was the inclusion of New Orleans as the third and final stop, at the annex space to the Renaissance Arts Hotel, where Arthur Roger Gallery oversees the program. The opening would coincide with White Linen Night, a large street party that serves as one of the year's biggest fundraisers for the Contemporary Arts Center (CAC), where I had recently gone to work as part of my effort to bring a major international art biennial to the city post-Katrina. For the SVA project to converge so smoothly with my New Orleans undertaking gave me the opportunity not just to bring some new art into the city, but also to show off my new adoptive home to a dazzled group of former students, who lost no time picking up their cues for how to have a great time, even when the heat and humidity made it nearly impossible to venture out onto the streets before night cooled off the air.

In retrospect, there is nothing I would have changed about MFA Road Show, and I believe it admirably served the purpose of linking the students' classroom practice with the shock of reality that hits when they realize their academic careers are truly over. There is a kind of fearlessness that enables people to overcome obstacles, both real and perceived, in their career paths, and it's not something that can be taught. It can, however, be demonstrated through action, and that is why I think that MFA Road Show, despite its relatively modest scope and intentions, was an entirely unprecedented undertaking, one whose repercussions may well be felt long after its many participants have gone on to other, hopefully bigger and better, things.

**Featuring work by:** Nicholas Brooks, Si Jae Byun, Sarah Chacich, Jee Hui Chang, Eun Woo Cho, Damien Crisp, Charlotte Doglio, Mike Egan, Brianelectro, Nikolas Gambaroff, Miryana Gligoric, Hadassa Goldvicht, Peter Gregorio, Yu-Sheng Ho, Sung Hee Jang, Hee Soo Kim, Go Woon Lee, Crisman Liverman, Jason Bailer Losh, Lara Star Martini, Shiri Mordechay, Yoon Jee Nam, Rocco Nicolini, Ann Oren, Lai Chung Poon, Austin Shul, Ryan Sullivan, Lana Vogestad, Margaret Weber, Kristen Wykret, and Yejin Yoo **BP**

# Here

by Tim Ridlen

There is an assumption that we have never been more connected as a global community. With ease we see — halfway around the world — our other, looking back. But I, myself, have never felt so lost in the excess of the visual terrain. Is it even possible to imagine a place that hasn't been mapped, measured, photographed, or written about? The landscape in particular, its image and geography, has become a disconnected entity, not experienced as "here" but "elsewhere." Taking its title from a 1974 film by Jean-Luc Godard, *Here and Elsewhere* represents an affront to the perceived "connectedness," in favor of a more genuine relationship to the physical environment, its history, and image. In his or her own way, each artist confronts geography and the landscape, revealing it to be idealized, institutionalized, and ultimately alienating.

As the problems of globalization and "identity politics" recapitulate themselves in our current moment, subjectivity takes on a spatial dimension. Our world is defined by our borders, our buildings, and our expanding horizon line, while we are asked to locate ourselves within it. Our approach for this project is not meant to put forth a particular politics of identity, but we recognize that we are indeed situated in a particular geographic location. This geographic landscape opens onto a set of political and cultural landscapes. To be specific, the Midwest is not the Middle East, but in light of the heightened turmoil there since the beginning of this decade, we all look in that direction expecting it to define our moment.

As in Godard's film, the image from abroad determines how we see the other, but more importantly it determines how we see ourselves. The "colonizer" is also being "decolonized." Part of what characterizes the work in this exhibition is not locating, but rather relating locations of subjectivity. If anything, we are asked to experience multiple subjectivities, and asked to experience them in a multiplicity of places forever unfixed.

Irit Rogoff means to claim geography as another characteristic of subjectivity when she says, "Space, as we have understood it, is always differentiated, it is always sexual or racial, it is always constituted out of circulating capital and it is always subject to the invisible boundary lines which determine inclusions and exclusions." She also expands the power of that definition into the realm of cultural production as she continues, "That is to some extent what is happening in the arena of spectatorship: we have left behind the simple binaries ... and expanded the arena to contain all the nuances of located difference."<sup>1</sup> Spatial difference — and the way in which that difference is measured, mapped, or talked about — makes trouble for the idea of a universal connection between that which is here and that which is elsewhere.

What should be challenged about the categories "landscape," "geography," and "location?" How are we defined by our environment, location, and geographical boundaries? How do we experience ourselves within an understanding of these concepts? How do we experience others?

*Here and Elsewhere* started as a group curatorial project created as part of the 2007 undergraduate exhibition at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The six artists in collaboration are Clint Bangers, Julia Doran, Carter Lashley, Tim Ridlen, Harley David Young, and Daniel Zaretsky. For the exhibition at Boots Contemporary Art Space each artist has created new work. In addition to the gallery exhibition, video programs by Tim Ridlen, Ian Morrison, and Alexander Stewart were projected in the backyard of Boots. In correspondence with the Artists in the Marketplace participants at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, Boots hosted a video flat files selection from five of those artists: Fanny Allié, Jessie Alpern, Megan Michalak, Hiroyuki Nakamura, and David Politzer. Artists from the gallery exhibition and Boots Director Juan William Chavez took place in a round table discussion at the Bronx Museum of the Arts to talk about themes relevant to the exhibition there as part of the Artists in the Marketplace series, also titled *Here and Elsewhere*. **BP**

<sup>1</sup> Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture*. (London; New York: 2000) 35.



Julia Doran with "Monsanto Chemical Plant," 2007, her replica of the St. Louis factory made from cake frosting.



Back yard at Boots during "Landscaping," 2007, curated by Alexander Stewart, part of the video screening series.

# Elsewhere

by Erin Riley-Lopez

*The Tale of Three Cities: New York–Chicago–St. Louis* — On Friday, July 27, 2007 The Bronx Museum of the Arts presented a roundtable discussion as part of the public programming for *Here and Elsewhere* Artist in the Marketplace 27th Annual Exhibition. *The Tale of Three Cities: New York–Chicago–St. Louis* included eighteen panelists; six artists who just received their BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the director of Boots Contemporary Art Space in St. Louis, ten Artist in the Marketplace (AIM) program participants, and myself, the assistant curator at the Museum, who served as moderator. The concept of this roundtable was developed because two exhibitions *Here and Elsewhere* opened one day apart on March 31 and April 1 of this year in New York and Chicago. *Here and Elsewhere* at The Bronx Museum of the Arts was the 27th annual exhibition of the Artist in the Marketplace program. *Here and Elsewhere* in Chicago was the undergraduate thesis exhibition and curatorial project of six artists from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The Bronx Museum devotes one third of its exhibition programming each year to AIM. AIM marks the Museum's ongoing commitment to provide emerging artists in the New York metropolitan area with training, encouragement, and a venue for exhibition. In order to foster dialogue and exchange among artists working in different centers, we invited the six artists from Chicago as well as Juan William Chavez, Director of Boots Contemporary Art Space in St. Louis, whom the Chicago artists have collaborated with, to meet and have a discussion with the Museum's current group of AIM artists.

The roundtable focused on the idea of how New York City has long been considered the "center" of the art world. However, this idea is beginning to shift as art centers are beginning to pop up across the country due to a number of factors such as rising real estate costs, lack of resources, and a competitive art market. The panelists explored how other centers relate to or react against the idea of New York as "The" center. The topics that emerged included everything from alternative run spaces to local versus international visibility, and real estate to MFA programs. But the thread that was apparent throughout the conversation was the idea of community. After all, where an artist is located has a lot to do with the community they are involved with and how effective it can be to their career. Each year when we ask the AIM artists for feedback about the AIM program, they consistently mention what a huge community builder the program is and how thankful they are to have gotten to meet a wide spectrum of artists working in a variety of media. Often communities of artists will shift together when relocation becomes a necessity. An example of this, as one panelist mentioned, is a group of Brooklyn artists living in small towns upstate near the Hudson River. Another panelist noted that the model of the center is not necessarily applicable anymore citing how the entire Midwest has banded together with cities like Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and Chicago as one large base. And, another panelist said that an artist can be in one place and many others at the same time. This idea was perhaps a very good example of the "Here and Elsewhere" that brought this panel together in the first place.

Clearly, and perhaps refreshingly as well, the artists on this panel did not necessarily think of the city they live in as a center, which can have negative connotations, but as more of a networking tool. Even though an artist may have a home base in one city, this does not necessarily exclude them from working or perhaps even living in other places and finding communities that reach across borders, connecting them to the larger art world. **BP**



At the panel discussion at the Bronx Museum on Friday, July 27, 2007

# Every Unemployed Curator Is Not an Independent Curator

by Georgia Kotretsos

In the order they appear in the following interviews, Dana Turkovic, Jan van Woensel, Elpida Karaba, Cecilia Canziani, Sotirios Bahtsetzis and Abdellah Karroum were invited to discuss their vision, their thoughts, their place, and future in independent curatorial practice. With some I've worked with in the past, some I've met briefly, and some I've never even seen in person. I searched for practicing curators who were born after 1969, wanting to seal a group that would be in full-swing in the 90s when the curatorial education boom was taking place. It's a diverse group that has been active from three to nearly ten years, that concurs different schools of curatorial thought, that navigates between their own individual geographical limitations and international opportunities. It's a group I enjoyed working with a, a group that offers a plethora of ideas, thoughts, and experiences of. Thus, I'm offering our discussions to you for further consideration and dialogue.

Why did I interview six contemporary independent curators?

1. This perhaps shouldn't be the first reason, but it all started with intuitive reservations about independent curators. I've shared more handshakes with independent curators than artists, art critics, or historians over the past five years and trust me, I'm not hanging out at the wrong places. I wasn't always convinced that my handgrip was received by an independent curator and not by an impostor, an amateur.

2. Over the past fifteen years, an untold number of individuals have rushed to cash in one to four years of their life to become one of those so-called independent curators—contrary to their predecessors who proffered an ideological stand rather than a career strategy. Traditionally, one would withdraw from an institution would make clear one's own independent status under an institutional roof, where as now days independent practice

may provide curators with a permit to build a portfolio to compete for those few hard-to-get institutional curatorial positions. In the October 2006 issue of *Flash Art*, Andrea Bellini lists and briefly introduces the most prestigious curatorial programs worldwide.<sup>1</sup> I'll also list them here, in the order they appear in her article for your reference:

## EUROPE

- L'école Magasin, Grenoble (since 1987)
- Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne
- Université de Haute Bretagne, Rennes
- Royal College of Art, London (since 1992)
- Goldsmiths College, London (since 1995)
- De Appel, Amsterdam (since 1994)
- Konstfack CuratorLab., Stockholm (since 1999)
- University of Applied Arts, Vienna (since 2002)
- École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Geneva

## UNITED STATES

- Whitney Museum Independent Studio Program, New York (since 1967)
- Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, Annadale-On-Hudson, NY (since 1994)
- Columbia University, New York (since 2002)
- College of the Arts, San Francisco

## CANADA

- University of British Columbia, Vancouver (since 2001)

## ASIA

- Lasalle-Sia College of the Arts, Singapore
- Arts Initiative, Tokyo

3. There is "enough" theory on paper by star curators, significant curators, pioneering curators, who are being interviewed over and over again, who are invited to write essay after essay,

These curators are discussing independent curatorial practice in 2001, in 2003, and then again in 2007 without fully acknowledging all those individuals who whimsically initiate themselves as independent curators when they fail to "fit" the role. Only when academia assimilates the "field" in its entirety will we have a picture proximate to its current condition.

Despite the efforts of numerous publications to write and unfold the independent curatorial history and its recent evolution by featuring only the curatorial elite, do you trust that the practice is being recorded accurately in 2001, in 2003, and then again in 2007?

4. Artists have a portfolio handy at all times to be reviewed by curators. It's about time artists review curatorial portfolios, too. Not a CV, a portfolio where a) the spatial awareness, b) the conceptual framework of a body of exhibitions, c) the consideration of the audience's choreography, d) the understanding of audience politics and sites, e) the understanding and knowledge of a wide range or specialized disciplines by a curator is evident and at the artists' disposal to review and consider. I feel it is old school yet true that "curators choose artists" and not the other way around. But it can and should work both ways.

5. And last but not least, because I need to emphasize that some are simply unemployed.

Special thanks for assisting me to jump-start a pointed quest:  
Judith Richards, Almut Wiedenmann, Jay Koh, Mary Jane Jacob

1. Bellini, Andrea, *Curatorial Schools: Between Hope and Illusion*, *Flash Art*, October 2006, Vol. XXXIX No. 250, p.88-92



## Dana Turkovic

Independent Curator; Gallery Director;  
Adjunct Faculty Webster University

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Born in 1975

Lives and woks in St. Louis, MO, United States

///  
2005, MA in Curatorial Studies, Goldsmiths College  
University of London, United Kingdom

**Georgia Kotretsos:** You started off in St. Louis, off you went to L.A., then London, and finally back to St. Louis after nearly 10 years. What has changed in independent curatorial practice in St. Louis since you left, and what does your curatorial baggage contain after leaving L.A. and more recently London?

**Dana Turkovic:** I like the word "baggage" and its reference to movement and travel, which has been the biggest influence on how I approach my practice. My curatorial baggage from living in Los Angeles and London is a direct response to my having lived in these cities, and strategically so. My experience in Los Angeles was thanks to my job at the UCLA Hammer Museum, the supportive community of art schools, ambitious

artists, the other museum professionals that I worked with, and being intimately involved in the production of exhibitions. My experience in London was one of academia and travel. I completed my Masters Degree in Curating from Goldsmiths College in London, where I focused on the practical and intellectual approaches to creative curating by meeting with professionals working and contributing to the field, reading critical texts, engaging in timely discussions about the role of the curator in today's art world – its advantages and its dangers – and most importantly dedicated writing. All of these things helped me to embrace London. Meanwhile I was able to refine what I learned in Los Angeles about conceptualizing and organizing exhibitions and apply this knowledge to the art scene here in St. Louis, which I hope has already made a contribution.

**GK:** You talked about conceptualizing and organizing an exhibition, but what are the challenges involved in applying an exhibition concept that is resolved on paper to an exhibition space where its own parameters and characteristics will read as part of the exhibition, too? How important is the understanding of space, in a sculptural sense, to a curator?

**DT:** This is a complicated question and one in which I feel I could give a few different answers, depending on what sort of exhibition I am working on. Of course, space in a geographic sense and space in relation to the history and/or mission of the gallery or museum space is very important when thinking about the physical size of a show and its relevance to where it is placed, but I don't feel that the ideas I have for exhibitions are ever completely resolved on paper, even once I have finalized an artist list for a show, and I feel I have come to an understanding about the work and my intentions with the idea or theme behind a particular exhibition. I try to allow some fluidity between my interpretation and one that might be held by visitors or even by myself once the work is actually in the space. It is at this point when the dialogue occurs and I simply respond to that visual conversation between the architecture of the space, myself, and the artist's work. I feel it is a successful exhibition when I am surprised by links between the works that happen subconsciously and solidify my original idea, adding additional layers. It is this particular ambiguity that I find fascinating, managing to avoid forcing the artist to fit my needs or manipulate the meanings of artwork to fit my ideas, but instead succeeding

to provide a complimentary transference between curator and artist, presenting an outcome already strongly inherent in the objects exhibited.

**GK:** Speaking of space in a "geographic sense," from an independent curator's stand point is almost talking about a journey – where navigation through art spaces is continuously pursued – where for a curator attached to an institution the "borders" of space are often very well defined. What are your thoughts on being your own captain and on those being stationary at the opposite end?

**DT:** In a lot of ways, being my own "captain" is certainly ideal as it allows for more room for experimentation and a sense of freedom for maintaining my original ideas. As an independent curator my goal is for each project or exhibition to first and foremost respond to the space: geographically, physically and ideologically. These challenges I feel are most rewarding in regards to being on a journey as it allows for me to mold the concept from the beginning as a direct response to these elements.

To speak in regards to a curator attached to a museum venue, what I feel would be advantages would certainly be the ability to work on an exhibition with a more adequate budget, also on a larger scale, and I most certainly wouldn't object to the size and diversity of the audience reached. There are constraints in terms of having to conceptualize exhibitions within set "boundaries" but I also feel a good curator would be able to transcend those issues by putting together an exhibition that exceeds any spatial constraints.

**GK:** As a practicing independent curator "... maintaining your original ideas" is what I wanted to hear, but most importantly, I want you to discuss your ideas with me in order to follow your views and work. Also, you brought up the subject of "adequate budget" within an institutionalized setting and I'm curious to hear how you fund your projects. By doing so without a crew has it ever left you at sea?

**DT:** Since I would consider my curatorial practice to still be in its infancy, my ideas are in a constant state of response in terms of the space I am working in, so right now I feel I have a lot of

continued on page 11

freedom to explore. Although recently I have noticed a few recurring themes present in past and current projects — one is an exploration of containment, be it a physical, conceptual or ideological translation. There is also a performative aspect to my curatorial work, whereby I tend to tie myself into the exhibition or add an element of musical performance or entertainment.

At the moment I am spread out between a few different gallery spaces, all with different missions. In the past, when necessary I funded the projects myself or worked collaboratively with one or two other people on a project. I work for one of the Universities here in St. Louis as a gallery director so I can get money from the school to organize the exhibitions, but again it is 5 exhibitions a year and there isn't a lot to work with budget-wise as far as shipping and things like that. I also work as an Assistant Director at a commercial gallery, and when I am working on a show for that space it is funded by the gallery, and again it is a small budget for printing, shipping, mailing and installation. With the exhibition at Boots, we have to be creative about where we get materials and equipment for the project, thankfully, this is a small community of people who try their best to help you get the things you need. In the past, I organized exhibitions that didn't necessarily require a budget, such as the series I hosted in my office at the Hammer Museum and the nomadic project I did where I printed T-shirts, wore them, and moved the exhibition around with me. Other exhibitions happened in unused spaces in Burford, United Kingdom, Los Angeles and here in St. Louis. One other project I worked on was called Empty Nest, where I emptied my house in Los Angeles right before I moved to the UK and hosted an exhibition in my home as a symbolic gesture and a way to mark my absence from the scene there. These things cost me almost nothing, so you find creative ways to curate exhibitions with whatever resources you have or are willing to ask for.

**GK:** "...tie yourself into the exhibition or add an element of musical performance or entertainment." That's a valid statement, why is that the case though? To what degree can these kinds of interventions occur without taking away from the work? You see, as a viewer, I do slip on that banana peel and do attend shows because of those after-show-elements. I'm not sure where I stand in all this, yet I find art has a hard time competing with a great musical performance.

**DT:** I think what I meant to imply was when thinking about exhibitions and elements of work that I am particularly inter-

ested in, I have found there is a commonality that runs through my previous projects, such as the exhibitions in my spaces in Los Angeles and in the UK in Burford, or even when conceptualizing our MA show at Goldsmiths and the *Lit Room* exhibitions at Ellen Curlee's. I am not necessarily looking to sensationalize the exhibition experience but to tie it into the concept when it is relevant to do so. An example of the combination of fusing myself with an exhibition and an element of musical performance is in my current project for the *Lit Room* here at Ellen's. I am doing an installation that plays on the notions of surveillance, voyeurism and exhibitionism and the points where they interact and overlap within society and art. It's called *Who Watches the Watchers* and is based on Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, a prison design with a supervisor (or the curator — myself) in a central control tower. I will have a band playing in "lockdown" at a secret location (The Hunt Gallery at Webster University) they will be webcast live playing and projected downtown at Ellen's. We (ECG) will be simultaneously webcast back to the Hunt Gallery — "the seen being seen" dyad.

**GK:** I'd like to focus though for a minute on creative curatorial gestures in terms of displaying the artworks, which occasionally enhances the reading of the works, but other times I wonder if the curator is being too much of an artist. Am I being too territorial or is it something worth problematizing?

**DT:** I definitely think it is worth problematizing, as this is a very timely and relevant question in reference to my exhibition coming up at Boots. I am playing with the idea of collaborative structures by focusing on this relationship in particular, and I hope it will create a show that presents a "unique situation." Currently, I am intentionally ignoring any boundaries that may exist between the artist and curator or in this case: designer and artist. Refusing to accept that there might be any real boundary to begin with, given the existence of a "closed temporal loop" between creation, interpretation and reception and approaching this particular project with the idea of a collaboration, commission and an overreaching interest in the journey the artist will take to make a work that challenges everyday notions or expectations of exhibition design and display.

**GK:** Nicely said. Last, I'd like to ask you the following, which may seem naive at first, but I wouldn't do this to either of us if I wasn't sure. I suspect that when you were asked as a kid "What would you like to be when you grow up?" independent curator was not an option. How did it come about? When did

it crystallize for you? With whose work did you first identify your career choice?

**DT:** This is a great question, and one that I wish was asked more often of curators, as I am always interested in how they have come to where they are at, because I think there is more overlap than we realize. In my case though, I knew from at least the 3rd grade that I wanted to be an artist. I still have drawings that I made of myself as a painter. I never lost interest, and was sure that I would have something to do with the arts. I graduated with my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with an emphasis in Painting and a minor in Graphic Design. I went on to work as a graphic designer at the Forum for Contemporary Art (now the Contemporary) for two years. I gave up painting a few days after I graduated. I realized I wasn't passionate and dedicated to making my own work. I was always sort of an "organizer" of sorts, I put together a few shows at alternative spaces here in St. Louis, so I guess the bug started with just making sure that my friends' work was shown and I did all of the work to make sure it happened. I then moved out to Los Angeles to work as the graphic designer for the UCLA Hammer Museum. While working at the Hammer and living in LA in general, not surprisingly, I was surrounded by artists and very ambitious arts professionals. As far as choosing someone that helped me identify this path, I guess there were a few things and people involved in this. Definitely, the three most immediate influences would have been James Elaine, Hammer Projects curator, Ann Philbin, Director of the Hammer, and Russell Ferguson, who was a curator at MoCa but then moved to the Hammer while I was there. Most importantly, I had an unwavering dedication to showing my friends work and finding different ways, spaces and contexts for showing it. Ultimately, going to Goldsmiths and living in London were two things I really wanted to do, so I worked on projects to help build up my portfolio of creative curatorial projects so I could make that happen.

The one thing I would like to mention is that my work, concepts and ideas as a painter and as a designer, have manifested themselves in the ideas I have for exhibitions, in a very physical way, and I didn't realize this until recently, but this is really important in terms of how I think and what I think about and the sensitivity that I try and maintain. It comes from being an artist.



**Jan Van Woensel**

Senior Studio Professor, NYU; independent curator; researcher; art critic.

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Born in 1977

Lives and works in New York, United States

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2003, BA in Philosophy, at UA:

University Antwerp, Belgium

2001, MFA in Painting & Art Philosophy, at KdG:

Karel de Grote Hogeschool, Antwerp, Belgium

**Georgia Kotretsos:** The minute I saw the "Experimental Curating" course you offer this summer at the 3rd Ward in Brooklyn, NY, I became interested in your approach of putting such a course together within a studio/creative workshop setting. The course looks closely at methodologies of independent art curators while discussing and introducing independent curatorial practice and important figures in the field. Based on your knowledge, when and where do you begin to trace the model of the independent art curator and who are the architects of the practice?

**Jan Van Woensel:** I don't follow a strict traditional, historical timeline in my class because I think that independent curatorial practice hasn't changed much in the past thirty to forty years. It is more interesting and challenging, to present curatorial projects of then and now in a parallel way, rather than in a linear way. I don't see much difference in the working methodologies of, for instance, Doron Polak, Willoughby Sharp, Adam Carr, Raimundas Malasauskas, Niels Van Tomme, Li Liang, Nicolas Bourriaud, Harald Szeemann, Hans Ulrich-Obrist, Hendrik Tratsaert, Binna Choi, Toasting Agency, Jens Hoffmann, Seth Siegelau, or Allard van Hoom. It is not important whether or not they are independent curators. It is important to highlight how they explore alternative or nontraditional exhibition models that allow my class to think more creatively, innovatively and experimentally about exhibition making.

**GK:** The aforementioned curators did push and challenge known curatorial boundaries and methodologies through experimentation and alternative approaches, yet what are some of the key innovative and creative manifestations of their prac-

tice in your opinion that have altered our previously "boxed" preconceptions of curatorial practice and simultaneously acted as catalysts for further debate and experimentation?

**JVW:** Your question referring to preconceptions of curatorial practice implies a hierarchy between the so-called institutional and independent curator. Thinking in such terms is pointless. It is important to understand that many independent curators eventually work at institutions and inevitably inject their ideas in such more structured and slower working environments. Harald Szeemann, AKA the godfather of independent curators, was curator at the Kunsthalle in Bern, Switzerland, for eight years, he was artistic director of Documenta 5 in Kassel, Germany, and he curated the Venice Biennale twice. He was always faithful to his independent attitude. At the same time, many independent curators institutionalize themselves. "iCI" (Independent Curators International) in New York is an organization that develops traveling exhibitions that are conceptually designed by independent curators. "Toasting Agency" in Paris is an organization co-founded by two independent curators: Alexis Vaillant and Eva Svennung. "AIT" (Arts Initiative Tokyo) is a collective founded by six young curators and art organizers. There is an interesting and fairly unexplored likeness between those curators who aren't employed by an art institution, who institutionalize themselves, and those who work at art institutions and experiment within this environment. A well-known example is the curatorial work of Nicolas Bourriaud and Jerome Sans, the former Artistic Directors of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, France.

To answer more specifically to your question: the same way as I don't intend to teach a linear history of curatorial practice, I

don't isolate examples in history that could function as catalysts for further debate and experimentation. My course intends to show how any exhibition is potentially experimental, regardless from it taking place in a museum, a gallery, an apartment, a squat, or an abandoned island. The experimental aspect of my course refers to the initial conceptual approach of working in a space as a curator. That is where the experiment starts. You could compare it with the painter making his first brushstroke on his white canvas, or the poet writing his first word on an empty sheet of paper. Apart from having a certain vision or goal, you never know what the end result will be.

**GK:** The debilitating idea of placing independent and non-independent curators in one-basket sounds rather generalized to me. I suspect, though, you use the word "curator" as an umbrella term, which allows you to dig into the field broadly, by focusing on how these brushstrokes can then be applied on a canvas. If I had attended your course, it would've been a great tool for me in this section. At this point, I'd very much like you to discuss your vision with me and possibly refer to different approaches you have employed in your practice.

**JVW:** First of all, I like the word "vision." When you right click on it in a Word document multiple synonyms appear: dream, hallucination, apparition, idea, mental picture, image, visualization, revelation, prophecy, foresight. Typically, asking about someone's vision is a simple question that leads to a complex answer.

I guess that from the beginning of my career, I have always been interested in the format and the effect of a project. To play with the format of a project is probably an artistic outlet. I enjoy working on different kinds of projects. Diversity triggers new impulses and enriches my experience and the experience of my curatorial interns who work with me and are active co-thinkers. Currently, I am curating a Festival including a cinema, a concert, a series of live broadcasted interviews, and a rickshaw gallery tour; I am starting a contemporary art collection; I am working as the manager of Belgian painter Philippe Vandenberg; I am curating a monographic exhibition at MoMA Shanghai; I am working with Lee Ranaldo on an audiovisual road trip experience for the Garage Contemporary Art Center in Mechelen, Belgium; I am producing Whitehot Magazine ITV Art Programs, and so on...

The second field of interest, the effect of the project upon the visitor, is really interesting, too. I have always thought about the exhibition as an installation that generates a certain effect. Too often, an exhibition is merely a dull illustration of a theme. I prefer the exhibition to actually identify itself with the theme. I recently worked on an exhibition for Michael Bloomberg, the mayor of New York City. The show takes place at the Mayor's gigantic office building on Lexington Ave, and at Art in General in Lower Manhattan. The group exhibition is entitled "Horizon: About Travel and Melancholy." The show is not an illustration of sad and lonely, international traveling artists. Rather, everything about the show is melancholic. The corporate environment, the too difficult exhibition concept for the employees at Bloomberg, their lack of attention and interest for the exhibition, the modest size of the artworks that can't compete with the overwhelming hyper-designed Bloomberg interior, the misprints in the brochure, the dimmed lights at the exhibition spaces, and even the fact that the show is not open to the public is melancholic in a way. Obviously, this is not an effect that most visitors will enjoy, but that is what they'll get.

So, back to my vision... I like to think about the curator as a chameleon figure. He is, or can be, or should have the ability and skills to be, an organizer, developer, manager and producer of exhibitions, lectures, symposiums, film-programs, performances, happenings, actions, concerts, festivals, TV, Radio and Internet programs, commercials, websites, publications, guided tours, quiz shows, gastronomic events and so on... My projects are probably always a bit experimental and naughty, and that makes them challenging, desirable, and sexy.

**GK:** You brought up a subject I consider the "Achilles heel" of thematic curated exhibitions... that being "illustrative" of course. I'm interested in the distinction you make from an artist's point of view, because I find it extremely limiting when an artist is asked by a curator to "visually" translate the theme of an exhibition. Please do elaborate on the matter and maybe try to offer a creative solution to artists who find themselves working under

such restraining conditions and also address your fellow colleagues who are willingly pigeonholing their ideas and expectations. Where do things go wrong in your opinion before we end up with a "dull illustration of a theme"?

**JVW:** When an artist gets invited to exhibit one of his artworks because it will function as a nice illustration of the show's theme (that's basically where things already go off track), he can do three things. The first option would be to accept the invitation and don't worry about any further involvement besides the loaning of an artwork for the period of the exhibition. The second option would be to decline the invitation. The third, which is obviously the most energy demanding option, would be to propose a new, concept-specific contribution. This is not necessarily easy—neither for the curator, nor for the artist. It is a sensitive matter. It requires a lot of communication, energy, planning, assistance, supervision, and, undoubtedly, extra financial needs. Often there is a lack of money and time. Hence, sometimes there is just a lack of willingness to engage in such an in-depth working relationship. I think it is very much a matter of getting along with each other, and, prior to anything else, the interest to collaborate should be mutual.

I have never asked an artist to make an artwork that should be a visual translation of a certain theme, but I guess that must happen frequently. My most naughty move was probably when I asked an artist, Stephan Balleux, to paint some works that look exactly like the paintings of another artist, Cindy Wright, who sadly withdrew herself from a group exhibition one week before the opening. Although this sounds like a disgraceful invitation to an exhibition, you must know that Stephan and I were very interested in the concept of copying other artworks, and plagiarism, and we have had many conversations about doing something together along these lines. Hence, both artists are people I've known personally for many years. Eventually, we didn't pursue this idea... Instead, Stephan painted ten paintings based upon the "Ballad of Sexual Dependency," of Nan Goldin, an artist who truly inspired him throughout his career as an emerging painter. Daring proposals can therefore also lead to good conversations that can lead to great artworks. Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn't. I like challenges, and I like to be challenged.

**GK:** Hearing you talk about the artist/curator working relationship, I begin to think of the elements that constitute a "healthy," constructive, and productive one – yet inevitably things occasionally go wrong. What are the most common mistakes you've encountered in this working duo and what are the qualities that you personally look for in an artist besides a "great body of work"?

**JVW:** I think that working on an exhibition is a growing process, perhaps similar to creating an artwork. That means that changes, modifications, revisions, nuances, or even radical turns, are potentialities. It is therefore, of utmost importance to engage the artist in this process so that he or she can relate to it, and can be part of it. I am not primarily interested in someone who has a "great body of work" as you say. Anybody can have that. I am more interested in a temporary relationship with an artist that leads to a certain result. This can be a single studio visit, or a three-year collaboration to create a museum exhibition. The qualities I personally look for in an artist are therefore more based upon personality, attitude, character, and approachability. This is true for many of the artists I currently work with: Sue de Beer, Lee Ranaldo, Philippe Vandenberg, Paulus Kapteyn, Zack De la Rocha, Vanessa Albury, Eric Van Hove, Kris Vleeschouwer, etc...

**GK:** Do/Could independent curators have an informal roster of artists they work with? Hypothetically speaking, if so, could an artist in 2007 instead of looking for gallery representation, look for an informal collaboration with a curator?

**JVW:** I think that many independent curators, as well as curators working at institutions, have a list of artists they work with occasionally, if not regularly. I forgot who it was, but someone of importance nicknamed those who repetitively work with the same artists the "family-curators." I don't know whether I qualify as such a family-curator, though. If I do have a family of artists, it isn't a very big family. I became very selective about artists to whom I would like to engage on a long-term basis, and to whom I would want to commit a lot of my time and attention. Working as an independent curator, lecturer, art critic and

teacher at NYU is very time consuming. For that reason, you have to be selective because you don't want to work on independently curated projects without having fun with the people you are putting in shows.

To answer the second part of your question: yes! Artists can definitely look for collaboration with curators, instead of, or as well as, gallery representation. In Belgium, independent curator Edith Doove, who was the artistic director of the first Hasselt Triennial in 2005, started her own agency to represent, distribute, and support a couple of artists, such as Narcisse Tordoir, Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, and Koen Vanmechelen. I think it makes sense that curators promote artists, and it happens all the time. Each time I meet with a gallery director, or an artist-in-residency director, there is someone who asks me who the next important artist is going to be. It's obvious that I select one or two artists of my family when such a question needs to be answered. I write a lot of texts for artists who are making their own publications, or who are applying for a residency somewhere. Amsterdam-based artist Takako Hamano was accepted for a seven-month residency at CCA in Tokyo this way.

Finally, I work for Belgian painter Philippe Vandenberg. I am hired for a five-year period, to promote his oeuvre in the United States. The first project I am working on is financially and structurally supported by four Belgian collectors who see the growing potential of Philippe's works in the USA. I think this makes a unique correlation of people. My responsibilities and tasks are similar to the intentions of Edith Doove's agency. I represent, distribute, and support Philippe Vandenberg's artworks in the USA. I am currently working on a major project titled "Le Point Zero," in collaboration with the Armory Show, and the VIP Program of the Armory Show, the Angel Orensanz Foundation, the Belgian Consulate in NY, and an art gallery with whom I'm currently still in the process of negotiation. Philippe Vandenberg is not just a random choice. I've known Philippe since 1997. He invited me for this job, as well as my good friend and colleague in Washington DC, Niels Van Tomme. It all has to do with trusting, liking, and understanding each other. His artworks, ideas, sincerity, obsession, and devotion to painting, have been of great importance to me from the time that I was a chaotic, ambitious, and radically minded art and art philosophy student in Antwerp, Belgium. I am curious to find out how the US art scene will respond to his artworks.

**GK:** When did independent curatorial practice become a career option for you and where do you see your work taking you in 10 years from now? Do independent curators work towards something specific? Is it a strategy or an ideology?

**JVW:** Your question takes me back to the start. I worked different jobs in Belgium: selling Patagonia clothes, working night shifts in factories, making pizza's at some fast food restaurant... I lived in the city center of Antwerp, on a tiny attic studio with a gorgeous view on the Cathedral. I know, it sounds romantic. One year after graduation, and countless temporary jobs, the Antwerp Art University asked me whether I would like to teach there. So, I went teaching. At the university, it struck me that few students were actually aware of the local art scene. Therefore, I decided to take my students out of the classroom and unleashed them into the active art scene. Although the university didn't really approve of it, I took them to major shows at MuHKA in Antwerp, Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, The Netherlands, and during a school holiday to Glasgow, and Scotland's nature. I still think that working at the university, in close relationship to some of my students, somehow triggered my interest in organizing shows and projects. Maybe, the university's studio space is where it all started, which would be interesting. When teaching made me too tired, I quit my job and stayed unemployed for a couple of years. In Belgium, that is possible. People can live and survive from welfare for at least two or three years. So, having lots of time, a modest income, and loads of ideas, I started traveling to Amsterdam, Belgrade, Shanghai, Paris, London, Glasgow, Dublin, Madrid, Milan, Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt, and Cologne frequently. I made contact with art galleries, artists, curators, and art writers, and I always had a free place to stay at all those cities, in all those countries.

I organized my very first show, titled "Scenery I," in a squat located in the city center of Antwerp. The show was set up with a €500 budget, my personal investment, and featured a group of international artists such as Mai Ueda, Andrew & Douglas Fisher, and Takako Hamano, and Antwerp-based artists such as Peter

Lemmens, Lucie Renneboog, and Jethro Volders. Shortly after that exhibition, Fleurie Kloostra, the art director of the Flemish Cultural Center in Amsterdam, invited me to propose a show for their fall 2005 program. I decided to make a reconstruction of "Scenery I," because I wanted more people to see it.

The whole exhibition, including the building that I squatted in Antwerp, would be reconstructed. My initial, self-invested budget of 500 Euros turned into a budget totaling 50,000 Euros provided by the Flemish art institute. It was then that I realized that I must be good at selling concepts, motivating people and investors to help realize my ideas for exhibitions. At Scenery 2, I invited Raimundas Malasauskas (CAC Vilnius, Lithuania,) Jens Hoffman (then Director of Exhibitions at ICA London, UK,) Philippe Van Cauteren (Artistic Director SMAK, Ghent, Belgium,) and Jeanette Ingberman (Curator at Exit Art, New York, USA). I also worked with the students of "de Appel," a curatorial training course in Amsterdam. It wasn't an immediate break-through whatsoever, but it sure made me go for it. Working on such an immense project helped me to define my position as a curator doing stuff that other curators weren't doing, at least not at my age. I was twenty-seven then.

It is tempting to say that I wish to be doing something unrelated to curatorial work in ten years from now. I believe that it is healthy to change perspectives in life. That said, I think that museum directors and institutional curators should be replaced every four years to secure an ongoing flow of new ideas, conceptual inputs, and personal ambitions. Thinking about myself in ten years from now, I might be a manager of a tattoo shop where people can get tattoos designed by contemporary artists such as Vito Acconci, Toba Khedoori, and Pierre Huyghe. I might have opened an art hotel: something between a tourist hotel and an artist-in-residency with workshops, indoor and outdoor exhibition spaces, a cinema/conference hall, and of course a swimming pool. I might be exhibiting my funky super 8 films at the Whitney and Shanghai Biennial. I might still be manager of studio Philippe Vandenberg in New York with extra offices in San Francisco, Seattle, Miami and Chicago. As long as I enjoy doing these things, I will do them. Send me another email in ten years from now to find out.

Strategy, or ideology? I am sure that when I was traveling, and looking for curatorial work, I was following a certain strategy to get what I wanted. I went to some openings, spoke to the important people at museums, and I got invited as visiting lectur-

er at some universities and artist-in-residencies in Europe. There was even a time that I just made appointments with museum directors without having done any curatorial work to refer to. I guess I just wanted to talk. Nevertheless, when I look back at my work, I must say that all my important projects, collaborations, or forms of recognition happened spontaneously. Right now, I don't care too much about it. I have a better idea of the art world circus, and I am not horny for fame or anything. I have enough cool projects to work on, I have a great team of ambitious interns working with me, and I am not trying to become the newest, hottest, grooviest P.S.I curator. I am not interested in that. If people want me, they will find me somehow. Actually, how did you find me?

To young people starting a curatorial career, I would give the following advice. Focus. Listen to music. Watch TV and movies. Go out and have a beer with your friends. Stop smoking. Listen to what artists say and learn from their artistic discourse. Make a painting once, maybe a drawing. Experience art: don't just look at slides. Be yourself. Read about art, and write about the ideas you have. Get a haircut. Have ideas! Have fun! Write me an email one day!

ture? Independent curatorial practice in Greece is an excuse to be unemployed or even idle.

So, my immediate gloomy reaction to this question is to respond in terms of a dysfunctional field that is in need of structures and institutions and professionalism (do work/get paid). I believe in institutions. After all, in order to develop a critique you first need to refer to something. In other words—this is something I frequently repeat because I like it—in order to kill a father you first have to have one. In any case, I don't think anyone at any instance speaks unconditionally, and I think institutions help us realize that. Of course, the next step is to be reflexive, or better yet polemical, towards the institutions.

So, in Greece we form a secondary point of view. We receive the fragments of a conversation referring to the operation of artists, galleries, museums, exhibitions, alternative exhibition spaces, publishing houses, etc. that operate very differently than they might have previously. We hear questions about the large and evermore imposing museums and institutions regarding their social function, once comparable to the sphere of public education or the university, but now diffused. We hear questions about congregational spaces, semi-public spaces, and so on, and if we really look around us here in Greece we will wonder in which parallel universe we woke up. Instead of making exhibitions, an independent curator in Greece should work for the institutionalization of structures, the development of discourse and for the implementation of professional/working rights. On the other hand, the condition of such a field is that almost everything is there to be done, and things are not saturated. The challenge is great, and the flexibility and the expectations even greater.

**GK:** In other words, we're talking about an imported discourse that is being tailored to fit the contemporary Greek art scene, which is currently exhausting the parameters of its "artistic freedom," in my opinion, by eclectically copying and pasting methods, theories, and practices. Indeed, the challenge is great and the flexibilities greater, yet what are the risks involved in growing without having the "art father" who can feed and stimulate this very dialogue? How do you bypass this in your work?

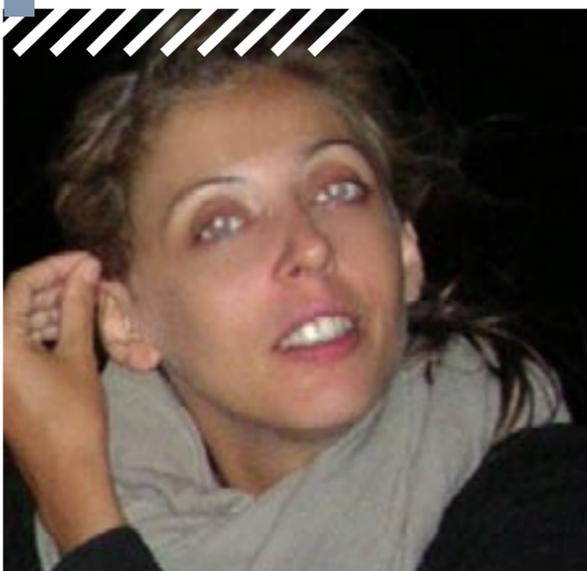
**EK:** These are two questions in one. First in regards to Greece's imported discourse, or secondary point of view (which reminds me of the secondary market that, of course, has its own value), one should be aware, but not overwhelmed by the fact; this does not mean necessarily that one can not produce original work. Besides, appropriation, as shown by the late twentieth century, can be very creative. It also depends on how one defines creativity and originality, it depends on the perspective. As I said before, one can locate/position his or her work in small shifts, small gestures, or short dislocations, rather than in grandeur. Besides, today more than ever, we are allowed to

recognize that the politics of aesthetics includes and defines the context on the basis of multiple short ruptures that allow art to escape the blackmail of radical subversion—with the disadvantages of resigning from the claim of subversion. The risk, as I said before, is that you don't learn what a father could possibly teach you: discipline, consistency, positioning, authority etc. But on the other hand, if one has not a father of his own, he can always invent one (and then have the joy to unnaill him).

**GK:** I read in my notes that you're currently working on a show and a publication that is focusing on the subject of institutional critique. Can you please introduce these projects to our readers in order to focus on your work at this stage, now that you've acquainted us with the context you're working from?

**EK:** One tries to develop a discourse that is a prerequisite, rather than to reproduce schemes without taking into consideration the discourse of others. Sometimes in Greece, making an exhibition is not enough. It frequently becomes a mere form. When disciplines are not developed, when infrastructure is not developed, to work towards that direction should become part of your practice. Now that I think about it, I started participating in such schemes even when I was in the UK, where the apparatus of contemporary art is much more developed and has a longer history. Along with two other curators, Nayia Yiakoumaki and Jaqueline Cooke, we organized a platform, Feedback, which works closely with the art audience, generating initiatives that challenge the reception of cultural products. When I came back to Greece, I continued along that line, (and I think that in Greece that seemed to cover a more open, "to be developed" area). I published a book on curatorial practice. I considered this publication more of a curatorial project itself. I invited young Greek (or Greek-based) curators (Kostis Velonis, Dafni Vitali, Nayia Yiakoumaki, Manolis Iliakis, Em Kei, Polina Kosmadaki, Christofos Marinos, Sotiris Bahtsetzis, Anne-Laure Oberson, Elena Papadaki, Kostis Stafilakis) to present one unrealized project. The narration, the presentation, and the proposal of each project was a pretext to raise issues on an "under construction" practice, on a wanna-be discipline. The publication can be a documentation, a portfolio of utopias and dystopias, a collection of preconceptions and misconceptions, and a pretext for a more systematic and consistent discussion that hopefully will allow us to take advantage of the symptom. (curating, *9+1 unrealised projects*, Athens, Futura, 2005).

So the publication, a curatorial project in itself, was an initial point of a particular discourse, a continuation of which is a project on museums and institutional critique that I am working on at the moment along with the art historian Polyna Kosmadaki. The remnants of these projects (for example the publications in this instance) can be used as tools, as materials, which are lacking in Greece. Being very conscious in the creation of these tools is a programmatic act for the developing of particular dis-



**Elpida Karaba**

Art theorist; Curator

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Born in 1971

Lives and works in Athens, Greece

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PHD candidate, University of Patras, Greece (Pending)

2003 Research Program, Curating Department, Goldsmiths College, London, United Kingdom

1995 MA in Arts Theory and Criticism, City University, London, United Kingdom

1994 BA Philosophy, University of Athens. Greece

**Georgia Kotretsos:** The edges of independent curatorial practice are indistinct based on my research, but even more so in Greece. To start off, I would like to discuss the field within the Greek art context. I feel it will jump-start an insightful conversation. When I began looking at your work, I instinctively contextualized your practice and became interested in how you define your curatorial status. I emphasize this knowing you've been educated abroad and thinking of the implications of your (re)articulating yourself upon your return through a different discourse in Greece. Could you share your thoughts on the subjects I briefly introduced?

**Elpida Karaba:** My most common lines of working concern the kind of subjectivity and the positioning in the global setting one can have through "small gestures," small scale, ephemeral, place-/country-/neighborhood-specific practices. Nevertheless, speaking of independent curatorial practice in Greece is almost ironic. Independent to what? To which structure and infrastruc-

courses that seem underdeveloped and sometimes purposefully ignored. For example, the issue of institutional critique has a double binding. Undoubtedly, it is one of the issues that marked the second half of the twentieth century both in terms of artistic practice and in terms of theory, but at the same time it is related to issues that torment Greek reality (see for example the constitution of the yet-to-be-built museum of contemporary art). Hence, dealing with this subject is at the same time something very particular but not necessarily restrictive, introverted, or claustrophobic.

**GK:** *9+1 unrealised projects* is not tiptoeing around institutional critique, it is an intelligent example of being critical without being predictable. You throw equal parts of theory and practice in the mix. What role does the *Reading Group* play in your work?

**EK:** Well, this is interesting now that I think about it, it seems more like a practice-based theory, or something like that, something which of course has its own dangers... The *Reading Group* was founded in 2004 by myself, Mandy Albani, Polina Kosmadaki, Christoforos Marinos, Sotiris Bahtsetzis, and Kostis Stafylakis. The *Reading Group* concerns itself with issues of theory, philosophy, history, politics and psychoanalysis that have an all-growing impact on contemporary art. But basically the *Reading Group* is a working team. We read, we discuss, and we challenge each other in developing first of all a discourse according to our particular interests and areas of research, where each of us has his/her areas of interest and practice. In addition, however, the *Reading Group* has gradually developed a public profile, which arose out of a need or an opening in the field. Whenever the time and circumstances are appropriate, we publicize part of our common work. For example, after the completion of the first year of working together on *Biopolitics*, the *Reading*

*Group* edited/curated the fourth issue of *GAP* magazine under the topic *Biopolitics and Art* (Trend or Position?). Also, in summer 2007 we published a book, a round table discussion under the title *Exercising Idiorythmy*, in relation to the participation of Vagelis Vlahos and Zafos Xagoraris in the Biennale of Sao Paolo 2007, followed by an invitation to the artists to the *Reading Group*. Our main concern is to work and research on the latest development towards a discourse on art criticism, academic historiography, and curatorial practice. Issues of interdisciplinarity, methodology, as well as the critical and analytical tools offered by contemporary art practice are part of our concerns and debates. We try initially to organize a corpus of basic philosophical texts—texts of art theory, political theory, etc.—and then we attempt to make links with art-related texts. Of course, I cannot speak on behalf of the other persons involved, because as I said basically we are individuals working together, but my idea is that this group works primarily as a challenge, a challenge first to our own methodological and scientific integrity, and secondly (hopefully) to that of the (art) field.

**GK:** I get the sense you're a team player. You're a founding member of the *Reading Group* and you have collaboratively curated several shows and organized projects with colleagues of yours in the past. I would like to see you talk about the chemistry between two or more curators when working together. What do you walk away with from a curatorial collaboration?

**EK:** I guess you walk away with things, but you bring out new ones, too. Anyway, I think it feels like "working in the expanded field." Different inputs make things more complicated (but in good ways sometimes), and I find this challenging, especially when working in small scale. I mean, when you work with already large and expanded structures a priori, you have to deal

with "collaborations," team working, whereas this is not what usually happens when you work in small structures. Somehow this seemed deficient to me, so when the time came to decide how to work, collaboration seemed more complete in a way. Collaborating happens to meet very substantial issues. It has been, for the last years, the core of my practice, where my interest has lied. Collaborative projects, relational public art, or public art of a relational type, and networks have been a serious part of my research, so in a way, "collaborative exhibitions" and work-in-progress, long term (I hope) teams and schemes seem to fit perfectly in the landscape.

**GK:** At last, please answer this for me: independent curator by choice or not?

**EK:** I believe that it's easy for one to conclude from the above that freelance in Greece seems almost a one-way (or maybe a no way out) necessity. At the same time, someone being optimistic could say that even in these circumstances it remains a choice not to accept to work for schemes that you believe are not compatible with what you do (That is, of course, if one considers hazy or scant opportunities as opportunities at all!). Nevertheless, despite the dilemma of freelance or not, I would like to conclude in a positive way. As I mentioned before, in a field which is under construction it is a great choice to do or try out things (and errors) that are not allowed in already mature or established situations, so now that I think about it, it feels like the stage of the first youth, filled with great opportunities and lost opportunities at the same time, and hopefully looking at a long future.



**Cecilia Canziani**

Independent Curator; Writer; Founding member of *I:1 projects* (Rome and London)

Born in 1976

Lives and works in Rome, Italy

2005 MA in Curating, Goldsmiths College, University of London, United Kingdom

2001 BA Hons. Humanities, Università degli Studi di Roma La Sapienza, Italy

**Georgia Kotretos:** After discussing independent curatorial practice with you in person for about five minutes, we ended up finishing each other's sentence by making the following statement out loud: "Every unemployed curator is (not) an independent curator." Who is an independent curator? Where does this "field" begin and where are we at now?

**Cecilia Canziani:** What does "independent" mean? In some cases, we describe an independent curator as someone

who is working outside the institution, a person that normally acts as mediator, producer, administrator, fundraiser, researcher, writer, press agent, all in one. Or in some other cases, we mean by independent curator someone that is more interested in less institutional forms of curating, and we have in mind perhaps Harald Szeemann, or Hans-Ulrich Obrist, or Maria Lind, and you see, all of them work for an institution in the end. Szeemann used to retain the label "independent curator" during his long lasting relationship at Kunsthalle Zurich.

In both cases, it seems that our notion of independent is less descriptive of a status and more of a specific performance of curating. With this I mean that very often some forms of curating, which I would address as "independent" and which interest me most, are carried from within the institution and even make use of the institutional frame to disrupt the classic exhibition format. I have in mind here the kind of practice that shares a continuity with *Institutional Critique*, and that is called "performative curating" or sometimes "critical curating." Again, both terms are very vague and non-unified, but at the same time they allow for a shift from the normative and restraining dialectic between institution and non-institution that is carried by the term "independent."

Maybe this is a term that we should in fact drop, in part, because the institution is increasingly incorporating forms of curating that are critical of the institution, and because the art market—and this encompasses the institutions as well—is changing so fast, confronting those who work in the field with very different issues and different choices. I have the feeling that when I started—not all that many years ago!—things were different. Today, the market is less regulated, and influences greatly events like biennials or Documenta. The predicament of globalization is such that the market determines its own rules, and this applies also to art. The market seems to be above the choice of the curator: you get suspicious at times about why a certain artist is represented at, say, the Venice Biennale, with a specific work and not with another. It seems to me that the space for curatorial negotiation is getting thinner as the collector becomes the main player and the main recipient, mind you, of the work. And it ends in this way: even on the ground of the traditional exhibition format, the show *Sequence #1: New Selections from the François Pinault Collection* at Palazzo Grassi won for its display, space and momentum over Robert Storr's Biennale.

**GK:** Let's talk about the art market and its hierarchy, since you wisely brought it up. How often do you feel the curator's business/mission is being sidetracked and compromised because of the needs of the market and to what extent? What comes underneath the curator, above the collector and in between the two?

**CC:** I first have to clarify that I am not in principle against the market—quite the opposite. As any other curator, artist, and art professional, I benefit from its current vivacity and I delight in the increment of investments in contemporary art for the simple reason that this translates both into possibility for the individual to economically survive and for art in general to multiply its potential.

What I was referring to in my previous answer has more to do with the decrease of negotiating power that museums and curators have over the collector. François Pinault, to mention only one, is by far considered the most important person in the art world. A gallery is likely to put a work on reserve for him, rather than a small but interesting local museum in Italy. Collectors of such caliber give better assurances to the artist and the gallery in which the work will be preserved and displayed and published. In some other cases, it is simply that a museum or even bigger institutions simply do not have the economic means that a private collector has. This opens, of course, other questions: what is the future of the public art collection? Will the museum, as we know it, survive?

There is then another subtle way in which the market interferes or flirts with curatorial or artistic choices: you have a look at a couple of major art fairs and you know: you notice and you hear (the gossip occupies a leading and interesting role in the art world) what the next year's fashion will be. One time it is photography, then drawing, then the return of painting. Suddenly everywhere you have exhibitions that pop up here and there and reflect on such and such aspect of photography, or drawing, or painting. It can happen that they are really great shows, too, offering a groundbreaking reading on the discipline. But it makes you think: what comes first?

That said, and coming back to the previous remark, I think whereas the market is above the structures in which we live, curators always have to demand what is best for the show, and

they mostly do. There are but few examples of compromise, but I reckon we don't have to talk about them.

**GK:** What "powers" does a great curator possess?

**CC:** It is tempting to answer by saying that the power that a curator has is what artists and the (professional) audience attribute to her or to him! But if I understand, you are using "powers" as an umbrella term, thus investigating the qualities and the capacities that a curator should have in her or his practice. In January, I was in Ecuador for a residency-based exhibition around which a series of talks on curating was organized. On one of those occasions, the curator Vincent Honoré, with whom I had the pleasure to work for the project, said, and I find the similitude extremely precise, that a curator is like an editor. So following this suggestion, I shall say that one of the qualities that a curator should have is to be able to serve the exhibition—which by extension means the works included—rather than the inverse. A good editor is very present, but not overwhelmingly present, and has the ability to disappear within the text. Nevertheless, her or his work is crucial to the results of the book. Another quality that a curator should have is to be able to collaborate. The last thing that I would want to suggest is that curating is a solitary and authoritative work. Curating is about creating structures of communication, and to me it makes a lot of sense that a lot of our work has to do with sharing knowledge and working as part of a group. I have been learning so much from the curators, the artists and the technicians with whom I have been working and conversing. Finally, more than a quality, I think that curators have a wonderful privilege, which is to work both in the field of theory — because curating takes a lot of research, reading and looking at works and exhibitions — and in the field of practice because being a curator also asks for fundraising, coordinating, and considering things such as "will the floor sustain such a weigh." The legal and organizational aspects of this job keep you in touch with reality, which is something that I like absolutely.

**GK:** Let's focus on your involvement in *Hospitality*, which you have founded in collaboration with London-based independent curator Louise Garrett, and *Curating.it* in collaboration with Daniele Balit and Benedetta di Loreto. How did these side-curatorial platforms come to be in your practice?

**CC:** I am very happy that you asked me about these two projects in particular because they have a lot to do with collaboration. *Hospitality* is a speculative project using Rome as a

test site to explore contemporary preoccupations with location, mobility, travel and translation as key terms within the fields of visual culture through presentation and development of local and international art practice. The issues that we investigated and the methodology we developed for this project — a mixture of theory based and hands on approaches — have really shaped my practice and a lot of the projects that I am now involved with are in some way connected to *Hospitality*. Louise Garrett and I met in London while studying at Goldsmiths and we found out that as curators we had in common an interest for the analysis and deconstruction of structures and rituals that determine the production and reception of exhibitions. We look at contemporary art practice as an interrogation of cultural space and context, and we are interested in interdisciplinary mobile practices in contemporary visual cultures.

The term "hospitality" is used in the project as an interrogative term to consider both public space as a bounded zone, in which the stranger is subject to the codes, rules and regulations of its host (city or state), and the common right of any stranger to any space; that is, the ethical imperative that the host receives whatever and whomever enters its domain. *Hospitality* was conceived as an on-going project and has so far evolved into a symposium, a series of commissions, a website that works as a resource on topics of space, travel and translation and a screening. We are now discussing the next steps to take, but as I said there is more than the actual event.

*Curating.it* is perhaps closer to the discussion you initiated with these series of interviews. I am interested in questioning and investigating what is, what does, what means curating. And when I came back to Rome, some three years ago, I met Benedetta di Loreto and Daniele Balit. We were brought together by a project by Barnaby Drabble and Dorothee Richter, who run an archive of independent curatorial practice. Specifically, their focus is on "critical curating," which is an interesting, but difficult, term. And at some point we just realized that in Italy there were not many chances to exchange ideas on our profession with other curators, or artists, or students, or whatever. An online forum seemed a quick, simple and accessible way to foster it and so we started this project. *Curating.it* triggers many ideas that I further explore in different ways: articles, exhibitions, texts. Again this is a project that I would not have realized alone, and it is fun to do because we are all three different with our opinions and points of view. And since both projects have very good websites, I invite whoever wants to know more to check for themselves: [www.onhospitality.info](http://www.onhospitality.info) and [www.curating.it](http://www.curating.it),

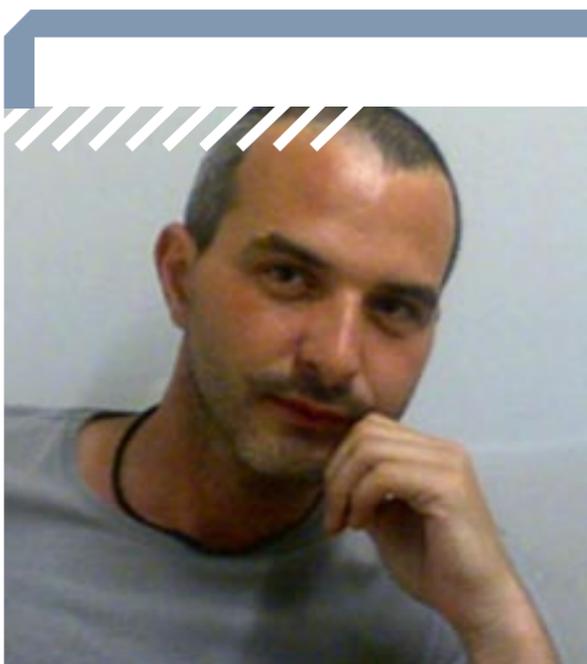
The two projects are brought together by the fact that all of us are founding members of I:|projects, a curatorial platform based in Rome and London... collaboration yet again! And one more website: [www.ItoIprojects.org](http://www.ItoIprojects.org)

**GK:** Could an independent curator or an independent curatorial ally become its own institution? We're aware of brand names in the field, where do you attribute the wide acceptance of one's own "no strings attached" vision?

**CC:** I think that many curators and curatorial collectives indeed become institutions themselves. Right now, for example, people decide whether to go to see Hou Hanru's Biennial or the Hans-Urich Obrist one. You can avoid mentioning the event, and just refer to the curator. Furthermore, to do so is more precise: it is less the geographical location and more the "curating" in the aforementioned examples that informs the exhibition. Both Hanru and Obrist have a very specific, very characterized way of conceiving an exhibition and displaying the work. So, going to see a show you expect that they will use a certain syntax, similar to the way you attend a MoMA show or a Tate Modern show and know that each museum has their own language and recognizable style. What, then, makes a show by Obrist or Hanru or a few other independent curators so specific, what makes them become an institution? Well, an independent vision that they have and cultivate. But what is even more fascinating to me is the fact that their vision — their independent-ness — becomes institution itself to the point that it even obliterates the institution that eventually employs them—in both of their cases, Biennials and furthermore museums.

**GK:** And last but not least, are you an independent curator for good? If not, then what?

**CC:** You ask me something that I have been thinking for some time now and to which I will answer in the coming months through my practice. In the country where I have chosen to live and work it is becoming increasingly difficult to economically maintain my position as an independent curator. Furthermore, I started wondering if we need curators or if we need other definitions of the same art-related profession more. I am less and less comfortable in the art-scene niche and I think that there is a lot more urgent work to do in the public sphere, starting from the schools. So I think that if anything, if not an independent curator, I would like to be an educator. And if we stay with a definition of independent as "independence of the mind" well yes, I would always like to remain such.



**Sotirios Bahtsetzis**

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**Georgia Kotretsos:** "Art curators," "Independent curators," "Freelance curators," "Multi-faceted curators," "Tactical curators," I feel the tentacles of curatorial practice are becoming very specific while the roles continuously and rapidly evolve. If that was not enough, publishing, collecting, dealing, research and alternative spaces founded by curators are very much in the foreground of this layered picture... Is the "field" and conversation opening up or is it being overly categorized?

**Sotirios Bahtsetzis:** There are often different labels attached to the same practice, and the reason why is simply economic. There is more and more talk, more and more buzz and hype about the market value of curating, its social hipness and its entrepreneurial cleverness; this effects the way that curators present and market their own profession. I remember writing a new curriculum on curating at the London Metropolitan University, which was addressed to new applicants, and using very often the neologism "culturpreneur," in order to attract, obviously, new students and also to point out the "significant" difference of this MA course from others of its kind. This is symptomatic of the expanding field; however, I don't assume that every curatorial practice is just one and the same. Curating is becoming more and more multifaceted, elaborate, and theorized. It intermingles also with other activities, which cannot necessarily be described as curatorial, per se, at least in the traditional sense.

Thinking about the multifaceted curator, it came to my mind a kind of typology of curatorial practice, which at least describes my own work. It includes four main categories: archive, narration, coaching and utopia. The "archive" type corresponds to

the old fashioned idea of curatorial practice that serves mainly pedagogical aims. The museum in its traditional role of collecting, retaining, and mediating is the emblem of this kind of curation. The second type of curation, "narration," focuses on the creative authority of the curator, who can offer a kind of visual essay as a concentrated, orchestrated act. The model in this case is the cinema-auteur. The third type, that I call "coaching" is the type of curating that brings to the public highly-individualized claims and issues by a chosen artists' group and functions in this case as a trendsetter. The model here is the gallery. (Obviously, I refer to the gallery of the 1960s.) The forth type of curation, which I call "utopia" strives to create social space inside given parameters. All kinds of "relational aesthetics" and socially engaged art—art as social networking, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, literal art, participatory, interventionist, research-based, collaborative art, etc.—fall under this category. Every curatorial practice refers to one or more of these four categories proposed here even when curators often concentrate on one mainly for self-promotion.

However, beyond any effort to classify curatorial practice, I believe that there are important issues that have to be confronted by curators. Because the contemporary world is a highly politicized sphere of social interaction, it seems that one of the most important questions today that art has to answer is how can it express political concerns (for example in terms of social function, context, locality) without becoming either a caricature or a case of bomb-throwing extremism. I think that Jacques Rancière's conception of politics as "a theatrical and artificial sphere" functions as a counterpart to the performativity of contemporary art making.<sup>1</sup> In these terms, the so-called

cultural capital, which is produced in the art field, creates surplus value by re-organizing the field of experience within the given performative context inherent to both politics and art. (I prefer this "situationist" notion of art over the "essentialist," modernist idea of art as redemption!) This can be a possible answer to the question concerning art as politics. Curation should use the performative potential of contemporary art in order to create an alternative model to the given order, to make those who don't have a voice heard, and in so doing to reconfigure the field of what can be sensed, thought, and felt—Rancière's notion of the "sensible," alias political.<sup>2</sup> Close to that is the danger of what can be called "the art of consensus." Both Jacques Rancière and Chantal Mouffe have written about the trend of contemporary art towards an all-encompassing, leveling, and product-making unification of all cultural production.<sup>3</sup> To propose differences and singularities and in doing so creating a space for "agonisms" is the way to oppose this massive standardization of a globalized-but-not-necessarily-free, market-based economy that affects lives and identities, and monopolizes the production of new markets, new desires, and new subjective dispositions. It's difficult to assert your self against the standardization of, let's say, mainstream gay culture or the marketable exoticism of the non-western "Other" or even the standard life-style of contemporary nomadism, which in most cases is another label for good old-fashioned business trips (especially when we talk about curators!). Of course, there are artists who work as nomads and real nomads who work as artists (these are my favorites!) who unfold the cultural dynamic of roaming and wandering, but I am not quite sure if this is easily applicable to curators. One of the main problems is to be able to assert your individuality (not your uniqueness or exclusivity) especially when you want to oppose the "culture of visibility" of the current established order.

The challenge for contemporary curation is to downsize projects, to embed a meaningful curatorial proposition into others, to keep active these connections and make them available and accessible within a common shared horizon (not only within the art world), without desiring the maximum effect and the overexposure of an event. I still find Alain Badiou's ideas for a non-imperial art (an art that opposes the consensus attitude of contemporary Empire, and in doing so nullifies every attempt to resist it) very inspiring. For Badiou, since Empire is sure of its ability to control the entire domain of the visible and the audible via the laws governing commercial circulation and democratic communication, it no longer censors anything. He concludes, "All art, and all thought, is ruined when we accept this permission to consume, to communicate and to enjoy. We should become the pitiless censors of ourselves. It is better to do nothing than to contribute to the invention of formal ways of rendering visible that which Empire already recognizes as existent."<sup>4</sup> I do not advocate that curators should stay home, but that we should think thoroughly when, why, and how we do what we want to do.

**GK:** Myriad question marks hover over what you wrote—you offer your thoughts for a dialogue, between the two of us first, and then for everybody else who will read them. Despite the 17 or so questions I have written down, I choose to focus on your closing paragraph because Badiou's quote is one canny choice for our peculiar times and the prevalent dimensions of independent curatorial practice. It's a call to put into good use our own individual "art police" by becoming "censors of ourselves." Yes, I understand that you "...do not advocate that curators should stay at home" but let's think about this for a moment, when needed... who/what is in charge of benching an independent curator whose own "art police" are indefinitely on strike?

**SB:** First of all, I have to say that the way I interpret Badiou's proposal to "censor our own selves" is actually less directed towards an attempt to introduce any kind of external agent or authority, but more to rethink the way, in which our own subjective disposition participates and supports the given status quo. Obviously, I am talking more about a moral obligation, an ethical agenda, an ideological positioning that should be embraced by everyone who is active in the production of cultural capital and less about a way to externally control it. Actually, while thinking about your question, I was reading about "The Madrid Trial" during this year's ARCO, an event where a critic and a curator put themselves on trial "for collusion with the bourgeoisie and other serious accusations" mimicking both the surrealists' trials and aping the style of a television courtroom show.<sup>5</sup> There was a defender, a team for the prosecution, witnesses and, of course, a judge, all well known curators and critics from the European art scene. It's interesting that this actually happened in

this moment and especially that this event was organized during an art fair. Obviously, the two self-appointed "prisoners" and the improvised court have somehow expressed the need to clarify situations, similar to the question posed by you.

Despite the actual outcomes of this peculiar trial, it becomes obvious that curators do feel that they are being accused, do feel that they have to defend themselves and justify why they are out there and not in their homes! This is symptomatic for contemporary discourse. On the one hand, we experience a massive proliferation of curatorial practices, and on the other side, this practice has to always be justified, theorized, somehow "protected" even more than before. Could that mean that this is so because all those supposedly diverse practices are not so different in the end, and for that reason they need the theoretical supplement for support? If we assume that the trial was not just a rhetorical game or a smart alternative to an art fair panel, but it happened in order to seriously investigate, in the judge's words, "the threat against the free spaces to produce art," or what being "bourgeois" means in times of neo-liberal leveling and devaluation, then curators obviously express the anxiety that their work already operates inside the Empire's apparatus and in doing so nullifies the outcome of their effort to resist it.<sup>6</sup>

It is very difficult to resist the leveling visibility, the spectacularization that leads to uniformity. I am actually also questioning if—and I apologize that I can not come up with a more cool idea—the authority of the critic can oppose the communication mechanisms and power apparatuses that already operate inside this system. Talking, of course, about art criticism as being an evaluating and regulating factor of curatorial practice means that all other factors in the art game, such as the market, the cultural bureaucracy, the academia can't play the role of a controlling power. The market doesn't want to, institutionalized culture doesn't have the means to, and academia comes always too late! However, I am thinking of the critic not as a professional journalist, but more—and I know it sounds romantic or even naïve—as an "amateur." (Finding excellence in others is, in the end, the justification of the power and the noble purpose of the art critic!) Amateur is the one that has an ideology, has a subjective position—which can always be debated—and, not to forget, enough time to be engaged in a debate. A critic is anybody who is devoted to a purpose, anyone that has the wish to fight for a change.

The second option can be the self-control of the curator or the artist (or anybody in the position of a producer of cultural value), a self-control that should be developed highly enough so as to function. I was referring in the beginning to the important notion of ethics as a controlling device. Critic Claire Bishop has pointed out that an orientation towards the ethical is part of a larger trend in the 1990s, symptomatic of what has been called our "post-political" age, a thinking that submits art and politics to moral judgments bearing on the validity of their principles and the consequences of their practices.<sup>7</sup> This thinking has definitely influenced contemporary curatorial practice. There is a broad (although not necessarily articulated) debate going on right now concerning the responsibility of the curator. I would like to be more specific and subjective. When I talk about "ethics," I actually think about the only possible, in my opinion, ethical paradigm today, the one proposed by Lacanian psychoanalysis, a theory that continues the emancipatory social agenda and the political practice proposed by the dialectic of Enlightenment as modified by 20th century philosophy. This theory and social practice is valuable not only because it provides us with the most profound notion of subjectivity—giving to any subject its real dimension and providing it with its own (limited) space in society—but because it is the only practice that can actually elaborate concrete steps—in education, in politics, in the practice of sociability, in the organization of living spaces—which might be able to erase the distance between the actual and the projected world. And this is the actual gain of psychoanalysis, a, let's say, "philosophical technique of living," that can change our attitude towards the world, and in doing so, change the actual world. (This is, incidentally, the way that artists work.)

**GK:** You give me two aces in this round—the critic and the public. You're not conservative by any means; I feel you distributed power to the right people. You talk about the critic and its "noble purpose," and you refer to the public as the "regulatory critical agent"—is that truly the case though? Is the critic being loyal to its noble purpose? And as much as I personally trust the public isn't it a pretty complex pack to read and trust?

**SB:** Allow me not to talk about this idea of the "noble" critic and leave it open for a later discussion. However, the complexity of the public requires further elaboration. It is true that when talking about the "public" we tend to think of it as the final judge on aesthetic matters. It is basically Kant's universality of moral and aesthetic judgment that created this ultimate trust of the public. Of course, we also shouldn't forget that the idea of being in an aesthetic state goes hand in hand with the idea of being a political active individual, as this was equally proposed in German Idealism (i.e. Schiller in Rancière's account). More than that, the notion of aesthetic innovation and that of political engagement are both embedded in the meaning of our "avant-garde," which still functions as the ontological justification for making art.

However, the notion of the "public" as such depends also on a mystifying generalization that has obviously a political function. The same happens even today with more updated versions of the same idea, as with Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's term of the "multitude," which also serves a political goal and creates another type of mystification with a clear mission.<sup>8</sup> For me, Negri and Hardt's "Empire" is not necessarily the only possible political analysis of today's situation, and it would be wrong to be read it as such.<sup>9</sup> As Žižek said, it's the communist manifesto of this century, in which we believe even though we know it is not accurate.<sup>10</sup> And this is the essential point. It is valuable because it has the power to mobilize. It is theory that mobilizes. It is interesting that this text on the one side emerges from the concept of affect that has been developed by such thinkers as Deleuze/Guattari and Spinoza before them in order to indicate an increased capacity to affect or to be affected by the world.<sup>11</sup> On the other side Negri's manifesto actually re-uses this same concept of affect as political means.

If I were to attempt to give a brief definition of the "public," I would propose a rather unorthodox definition based on this concept of affect. Is it possible to use the term "public" when we refer to individuals and groups who simply have the capacity to be affected by art in the same way as they are affected by the world? Being affected means establishing the preconditions for the emergence of shared space, encouraging a common place of collective engagement, without, however, becoming constantly spectators of our own selves. Paolo Virno speaks about the contemporary "publicness without a public sphere."<sup>12</sup> (I believe the symptom of this is the society of chat rooms and blogs.) I believe that this is aesthetic and political at the same time. It is this focus on patterns of circulation and relations as a politico-aesthetic activity that creates a common space, what can be described as aesthetic politics (in the sense of Rancière). Does this mean that the public becomes again the "regulatory critical agent" in the original meaning of the avant-garde, a critical agent both as political and aesthetic active subjects? Does this also mean that the public is and can be created by its art? The danger is always to impose the regulative norm, the big brother, the Father figure, who will resolve the antinomies, as it is difficult to think and act dialectically. If the public is a "complex pack," or even a "mindless mob," it still has a regulatory function, as long as it has the capacity to affect or to be affected by the world (seen as art) in a self-organized manner. We have to trust the audience. If art changes him/her, if it sets one apart from his/her passive attitude, if it can switch his/her attitude from passivity to activity and make him/her an active participant in the common world, then we can talk about the public as a regulatory critical agent.

**GK:** You left the subject of the "noble critic" intact. One hell of a can of worms worth discussing, though. I suspect why you put it off, therefore I'll let go of it. On the subject of the spectator and his ability to "switch from passivity to activity," I am a strong believer that when an artwork and a spectator meet, the least both could do is to switch one another to activity. It's not only the spectator's role to shift from one state to another but also the artwork's. As Sotiris, talk to me about the responsibility of choosing which audience and artworks may have the opportunity to "switch from passivity to activity" every time you curate a show.

**SB:** I think it is difficult to give either an account of which artworks or a formula about what kind of artworks have the ability to switch from passivity to activity as this remains always the key issue in every curatorial reform. We shouldn't forget, for example, that in the late 1990s and with the advent of "relational aesthetics" the focuses have shifted towards art that includes the presence of the micro-community to which it was referring, a

micro-community that was the one to be accommodated in the working process of the artist. In theory, the relational work “creates, within its method of production and then at the moment of its exhibition, a momentary grouping of participating viewers.”<sup>13</sup> Of course, the question that immediately comes to mind is the following: If the input and output of the artwork are the same, thus this particular micro-community, don’t we have to deal in the end with a closed-circuit relation that produces “empty” artworks, which nevertheless are convivial, user-friendly, festive, collective and participatory? Secondly, who makes up this group of participators that can be formed through this type of art making, which is incidentally promoted by state-funded cultural and educational institutions? In my opinion, these temporarily formed “collectives of viewers” function only as an accessory to the artwork itself, which promotes from its side the good will of the exhibiting institution to motivate and educate this ignorant public, and in doing so to promote the instrumental role for art in delivering “social inclusion.” (Don’t forget that in the late 1980s the main anxiety of all museum curators was how to make their collections user-friendly.) Bourriaud declares that “the aura of artworks has shifted towards their public,” and this peculiar sentence makes me think that the public in relational art is no more stupid and lethargic but is suddenly transformed into the added value of the artwork!<sup>14</sup> This is not just optimism, but obviously a political agenda that instrumentalizes the public! Many critiques (i.e. Helliwell) have accused relational art (and its “dream of waking the zombies of consumer culture”) of complicity with the very neoliberal imperatives it purported to critique.<sup>15</sup> This enthusiasm for the consensus, relational art, is not confined to art but has become the symbol of contemporary smart capitalism, which comes hand in hand with the collapse of the political into the managerial. This type of artwork that promotes happy sociability became the excuse for an even more accelerated neoliberal capitalism, contributing the maximum to cultural tourism, urban regeneration and the creative industries.

However, the question remains: Which artwork switches from passivity to activity? How can aesthetic pleasure be configured as a site of potential cultural and political conflict? How can art lead to a liberating subjectivity? Before trying to give an answer to these questions derived from my own practice, I have to clarify some things: First of all, there is and there should not be any magical, unifying, all encompassing and inclusive answer to these questions, as this would mean the end of any discourse on art, the creating of a harmonized consensual agreement. Secondly, when I was saying that the public has the capacity to affect or to be affected by art in a self-organized manner, I include in this so-called “public” myself and the millions art professionals around the world. I am not referring to the mythicized idea of a unified mass, but I understand public as an open site, following Laclau and Mouffe as a tension field of blocked partial identities formed by each other.<sup>16</sup> Thirdly, Rancière speaks clearly of the “alleged” passivity of the public. He argues furthermore for the value of contemplation, and critiques this division between activity and passivity as artificial. And this is the point: these conditions are not given, but merely based on misconceptions, which can be changed. (The paradigm of Situationist art is still prevailing.)

I think we can advocate a democratic change in the regime of art, in which ideally a flexible passage from being a maker into being a viewer, and from being part of a passive audience into being part of an active audience will gradually take place. That in theory! What are the means to achieve this through curatorial praxis? Firstly, we should be sensitive to both the importance and difficulty of situating “autonomous” aesthetic objects within their broader social and political contexts. Bringing site, artwork, audience and history together can’t be decorative! In addition, curation should be done in such a way that it is neither afraid to take a rigorous and, why not, passionate stand, nor content to deliver authoritative pronouncements. One of them, for example, is the current dogma of relational art, which in itself creates boundaries when it becomes mainstream. The proximity of an installation to “relational” practices doesn’t guaranty its potential of turning a public into an active agent. As critic Claire Bishop often said, the mere fact of being collaborative, or participatory, or interactive, is not enough to legitimize a work or guarantee its significance from the audience’s point of view.<sup>17</sup> Artworks of this type don’t necessarily have oppositional and anti-authoritarian strength anymore. Today, participation is actually used as a form of control of the public by business, mass media, and government.

I think reclaiming the political potential of new or existing artworks that might not appear as such—and not necessarily mak-

ing political or socially engaged art that does appear as such—should be one of the current goals. There are clearly endless examples of artworks over the last decade whose logic can be understood not in terms of the anti-aesthetic, purely conceptual tradition of the Neo-avant-garde, but whereby the possession of aesthetic value is the starting point for radical subversions. An old fashion painting, for example, might have more to offer in terms of audience activation than another hype-installation that merely stays inside given stereotypes.

Another dogma that should be challenged is the one concerning the authority of the curator. I am not talking about any kind of naïve claim that this role should be abolished, but more about a corrective gesture. What we ought to strive for as curators is the perspective of a critical, reflective participant, not the persona of the self-impressed, cool and fabulous guardian of the avant-garde, a person who oscillates between being a manager with a specific agenda or behaving as a weird outsider (because often this happens also to me). As curator Miika Hannula said, the process of critical and reflective thinking relies “on our ability to keep on keeping on,” at least, I will add, when we feel that we have something to say.<sup>18</sup> I really like his idea of “methodological anarchism.” However this doesn’t translate into any kind of relativism. Methodological anarchism accepts that there is no hierarchy of experiences but a constant need to situate the interpretation of a unique experience. It denies the legitimacy of the common claim that we have to do things this way because that’s how they have been done for years. (This is close to Rancière’s thinking.) That doesn’t mean that curators always have to reinvent the wheel. No, they have to make it turn! Each case has to be given enough time and energy to go through its details and specificities. (My biggest fear is when organizers, collectors, institutions approach me and ask me to make yet another show like the successful previous one!) Is this methodological anarchism not a concrete step towards the democratic change in the regime of art that I was talking about earlier? You can be a responsible maker only if you are first a truthful viewer. The change from passive to active public cannot take place through the implementation of pedagogical methods or tricks borrowed from the advertising culture and the world of corporate consulting. No encounter between art and its public can ever be complete, but this is an opportunity not only for creating even more demanding and sophisticated art, but also establishing a framework for mutual respect and reciprocal acceptance. This lack is the traumatic kernel of modernity.<sup>19</sup>

And this leads the discussion to some crucial ethical considerations. Do I feel responsible for the shows I put on, do I feel responsible towards the artworks and their aesthetic and theoretical framework, do I feel responsible towards the audience of those very artworks? Theoretically the answer is always “Yes.” It is however more important to question if and how my personal stance on responsibility addresses—and intervenes in—the dominant conventions and relations of my time. (We shouldn’t of course forget that a freelance curator is especially subject to all different kind of constraints in his/her choices.) I believe being responsible means following the ideological framework that everybody declares as valid for him or herself. In every single artwork I propose, I try to discover the historical significance, the anti-authoritative gesture, the truthfulness of intention and experience, the opposition to dominant modes of “making sense.” On the other hand I try to understand the horizon of perception of my audience, to create and re-generate the content of this particular discourse, and if possible, to create an “agonistic” network of mutually supporting individuals. This intervention should occur “underground,” it should be somehow invisible: critical, but not consumable. The aim of conceiving of and owning a truth leads only to the end of any critical discourse. Exhibitions should be able to focus exactly on these moments of not sharing, on the moments of cautious conflict, as the goal is always “to initiate public processes of self-reflection” that will affect both curator and public.<sup>20</sup>

**GK:** May I draw your attention to the curatorial education of your generation for a minute? Many of your colleagues (independent or not) have been put through an institutionalized cookie-cutter contrary to those who preceded you. What role does the educational system play in your relatively new profession? Is it a matter of affirming the discipline; providing individuals with a curatorial badge; or marketing an old flavor for a brand new one? You’ve gone from choosing to become a curator to being taught how to be one—how is that affecting curatorial practice?

**SB:** This question touches the hot issue about today’s enormous proliferation of curatorial practice as a profession. The current education system, especially in the Anglo-Saxon cultural area, has already established the career profile of the freelance curator, a job that can be taught in a MA course. We cannot answer here if and how all these thousands of new curators can be absorbed into the market. Neoliberal education politics don’t think about that. It goes against the dictates of the “flexible” labor market! While working on curriculum development in a British university, I had to repeat the government’s mantra of “Lifelong Learning” while focusing on the objectives of Tony Blair’s government in Britain to absorb as many new students as possible (especially students who pay!). New courses and post-graduate degrees in cultural domains don’t simply re-package the old ones and make them more hyped, more marketable. Specialization often corresponds with either current developments in the research fields of each institution (by the way, frequently guided by state or corporate-funded interests) or new trends in the art world. “It is difficult not to be struck by a certain educationalization of contemporary culture that is characterized above all by the fusion of didacticism and commodification,” writes Stewart Martin.<sup>21</sup>

In this respect, giving enough qualifications to students to proceed with this extremely demanding practice is one of the key issues of a curation course. Learning how to curate takes a lot of experience, which cannot be achieved only within an institution, even if the curriculum is strongly practice orientated or tends towards self-directed study (which often can be such an unimaginable failure!). Although I teach in a university, I strongly believe that reaching a standard of expertise has often much to do with personal engagement and self-education, especially when we talk about such a holistic discipline and a sensitive professional practice. University teachers and administrators of institutions should always pose the question to themselves, if what they provide is not just instrumentalized know-how, but also an experienced expertise.

The question is how this given professionalization and institutionalization is affecting curatorial practice. Esther Leslie writes in the Documenta 12 magazine that, “While Adorno may be right that art is a special type of labor, which reveals the critical pressure points of the system, in so far as it is industrialized as ‘culture’, it has become effectively like all other labor: alienated and boring.”<sup>22</sup> If you take Adorno’s pessimism for granted, then we can say that his views about art in general apply also to curation in particular. In so far as curation is industrialized as official culture, in so far as it has started worrying about grants, gentrification, media coverage, spectacle values, target groups, policies of inclusion of hard to reach audiences, etc., it has become alienated and boring. Of course, in times when everything has become a product it’s difficult to claim that curation can avoid turning into one, too. Even if we don’t want to follow Adorno’s views on alienation, we have to pose the question if the proliferation of all “politically correct art that largely satisfies itself with and within the gallery and grant system, competing within the terms of the creative and cultural industries” isn’t a by-product of the institutionalized, rationalized, effective educational system that markets independent curators.<sup>23</sup> However, there is also a positive development: institutionalized knowledge creates potential for overthrowing it. “Progressive radical education should be able to de-educate itself.”<sup>24</sup> I believe that besides the thousand blueprint shows coming out of rationalized curating “technologies,” there are many other alternative, autonomous and self-organized curatorial proposals and practices that criticize systems of monitoring and inclusion of the public, and reject systems of conventional and non-critical display, production and consumption, as well as the educational techniques that promote them. I think the possibility of some new conjoining of art and radical politics is more likely to be developed in such a scheme.

But it is not just a matter of politics. After entering the period of its institutionalization, curation faces new challenges in terms of its content. Let me tell you that I am currently thinking about concepts such as negative curation, immaterial curation, curation of gestures and experiences or curation as symptom. The question is, would the critique or/and the curating of curation, understood as, in Boris Groys’s words, “an act of presentation that presents itself” be the next step?<sup>25</sup> Can we go further than this performative act? (Allow me to continue this play of free association...) When curation is less focused on critical potentials of the individual artwork than “on the various broader networks of cultural translation, communication and exchange internal to

the operations of the art-world itself," would this mean that curators will assume a more clear political role?<sup>26</sup> Does curating promise a form of overcoming the gap between aesthetic and political and unifying human activity, which remains separated for most of the people in the realms of work and play? Paraphrasing Rancière's idea, can we talk about an upcoming "re-distribution of the sensible" as the actual goal of curatorial practice? (I have already started imagining the political party of curators running for the next parliament elections!)

**GK:** Finally, I'd like to ask, why are you an independent curator?

**SB:** What would be the answer if someone put the same question to an artist? "Why are you an artist?" I am sure there aren't many plausible or pragmatic responses that can justify a choice like that. An artist can always say, "I am an artist because I simply want to be." Can't this also apply to the job of a curator? Of course, one of the questions that follows is if someone has chosen to become a curator because he/she didn't want to become an artist. This somehow simplistic logic assumes that the hegemonic discourse is that of the artist so that the curator's existence can only derive from that. However, the genealogy of curatorial practice in modernism shows that the artist-as-curator was more or less a marginal phenomenon or part of an actual conceptual art practice.

For me personally, becoming a curator was a conscious choice. I am coming from an old fashioned art history department, which educates scholars and museum curators. While working theoretically on installation art, I decided not only to read about it but also to be engaged with its practice. That was my first step in curating ten years ago in an artists-run space in Berlin. I have liked the conviviality, the freedom, and the dynamics associated with the practice of the independent curator. (At that time, though, I was not quite familiar with the budget's perspective!) Obviously curating for me has evolved out of the theoretical interests in my academic training and my curiosity on issues of art theory in general. And it keeps supplementing my research interests, but also—and this is the important part—it makes them visible, communicable, and thus "political." I mean you can write a book on theory, but you always know that this will influence only some readers, it will contribute only to a certain degree to the overall discourse. An exhibition, however, can be understood ideally by every spectator and reach potentially any kind of audience. This immediate power to approach directly and possibly to effect change is extremely appealing.

In particular, Independent curation always offers the chance to redefine, re-assume your status as "independent" cultural producer... Independent from whom? From the institution, the audiences, the community, the mass media, the market or the art collector with which (and sometimes against which) you work. This is a relatively narcissistic and possibly schizophrenic attitude, but also a very liberating one. To describe it in a more idealized way, this is an act of freedom that reinforces the symbolic value of this profession. I am thinking of independent curatorial practice that can resist the pressures of the market, the personal agenda of the artists involved, the goals of the mediating institutions and organizers, and use all of them, as Mika Hannula says, simply as a tool! This is challenging!

Not to forget of course that curation has become fashionable since the curator star system was established as part of the status quo of contemporary art. Today's star-curator is a kind of internationally working academic-connoisseur-trendsetter-broker who actually resembles the profile of a CEO. This career profile is extremely appealing for members of the so-called "symbolic" class, although the actual job situation reveals thousands of underpaid professionals. However, it is too simple to assume that just the actual employment situation of cultural workers in general has created an "artificial" need for curators. The proliferation of curators corresponds with the proliferation of artists, institutions, audiences and markets. Freelance curating is the symptom of new emerging needs and aims in art since the 1960s. However, curation should challenge creatively the limits of existing conventions, without valorizing the authoritative persona or huge ego of the master curator as an end in itself. While it should be a committed, situated and a coherently continual endeavor, a curator should always have the courage to question his/her own personal criteria and ideologies, be open to critique and reevaluate them. This by the way applies also to myself!

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London; New York: Continuum, 2007)

<sup>4</sup> Chantal Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces," *Art and Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, 1.2 (2007), <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/mouffe.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Alain Badiou, Lecture, 4 December 2003, "Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art," *Lacanian Ink* 22 (2003) <http://www.lacan.com/frameXXIII7.htm>.

<sup>6,7</sup> Lars Bang Larsen, "The Madrid Trial," *Frieze* May 2007: pp. 54

<sup>8</sup> Claire Bishop, interview by Jennifer Roche, "Socially Engaged Art, Critics and Discontents," *Community Art Network*, 25 July 2006, [http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archives/2006/07/socially\\_engage.php](http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archives/2006/07/socially_engage.php).

<sup>9</sup> Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Antonio Negri, and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "Have Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri Rewritten the Communist Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century?" *Lacanian Ink* 18 (2001): <http://www.lacan.com/zizek-empire.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987).

<sup>13</sup> Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Semiotext(e), 2004).

<sup>14,15</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Presses du Reel, 1998) 58.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Helliwell, "Exodus," *Mute Magazine: Culture and Politics after the Net*, 11 July 2007, <http://www.metamute.org/en/exodus>.

<sup>17</sup> Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London; New York: Verso, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (2004), 51-79.

<sup>19</sup> Mika Hannula, *The Politics of Small Gestures: Changes and Challenges for Contemporary Art* (Istanbul: Art-Ist, 2006), 78.

<sup>20</sup> Bohman, James (ed.), *Pluralism and the Pragmatic Turn: The Transformation of Critical Theory*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001) 101.

<sup>21</sup> Stewart Martin, "An Aesthetic Education Against Aesthetic Education," <http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/article.php?ldLanguage=I&NrArticle=1504> (*Radical Philosophy* 141 January/February 2007)

<sup>22,23,24</sup> Esther Leslie, "Doing Something and Doing Nothing," <http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/article.php?ldLanguage=I&NrArticle=1505> (*Radical Philosophy* 141 January/February 2007)

<sup>25</sup> Boris Groys, "The Curator as Iconoclast," *Bezael Academy of Art and Design Protocols*, Issue 2, *Contemporary Curatorship: New Approaches*, [http://bezael.secured.co.il/zope/home/en/1143538156/1143802471\\_en](http://bezael.secured.co.il/zope/home/en/1143538156/1143802471_en)

<sup>26</sup> David Cunningham, "Answering the Question: What is to be done? (education)," <http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/article.php?ldLanguage=I&NrArticle=1491> (*Radical Philosophy* 141 January/February, 2007)



**Abdellah Karroum**

Independent Curator; founder of L'appartement 22

Born in 1970

Lives and works in Rabat, Morocco and Paris, France

2001 PHD in Communication, Art and Performances, Université Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux III, France

**Georgia Kotretsos:** What role does identity politics and geographical context play in independent curatorial practice today and specifically yours?

**Abdellah Karroum:** I would like to say immediately that these notions are very relative. For me these questions were experienced a few years ago with the project *Le Bout Du Monde* (<http://lebdm.free.fr>). For many people, especially in the art world, one's origin, name, or region are important. Some people ask me about Morocco or the Arab world, but I don't feel myself as a part of a region. I believe art has the potential to be a space for dialogue and exchange for the entire world, but I think also that an artist could act in a specific context, which might address the identity politics and geographical context you mentioned. It is important for artists to be respondent to a specific context and religion. Daily social life and the bodily conditions could play an important role for the expression — for building expressions — for visibility and communication.

My work in Morocco would be more difficult if I wanted to use an international method to produce exhibitions and public events, for example, in *L'appartement 22* in Rabat or in a small village in the Rif Mountains.

**GK:** I am pleased to hear you do not dwell on the dialogue of identity politics and geography. Nonetheless, you bring up an interesting aspect of curating when you discuss putting an exhibition in Morocco without applying methodologies used abroad. This is a very wise decision to make, because art has different needs and curating has different methods. How does your method differ when curating in Morocco to when you're curating abroad and why is that the case?

**AK:** The spaces dedicated to expression (or that artist and curator create for expression) are very different when you are in a country like Morocco. In Europe, the museums and other

spaces for art are very present in the art scene. In Morocco these spaces are very limited and the projects you can see there are very conventional and visually near the classical museum. The museum as a meeting point is a concept local to Europe. The usual context for art in Morocco is traditionally performance in public spaces. The meeting point in Morocco is the market place or the mosque (which could be at the same time as the market place).

Everything is based on "commerce" in the Moroccan context. It is very difficult for an artist to propose a work for only one context. I think this is an interesting characteristic and it is one reason that I include works-in-progress in my projects. To produce a performance in any public space an artist does not need any special license. He or she only needs to be recognized as an artist to exhibit what he or she wants in any public space on the Moroccan territory (see the traditional meetings of Aissawa, Jilala or Gnawa...).

One of the first projects at *L'appartement 22* is the series of exhibitions titled *JF\_JH*, and the method is to work at the same time on the artistic project and its reception within a specific context of Rabat and abroad. For example, we included images from the street in the first show at *L'appartement 22* (*JF\_JH individualités*) and we took the space of *L'appartement 22* to a public park (as a surface of carpet the exact size of the exhibition space). The conclusion was that when we bring images from daily life into the art space, it is not a ready-made, as we know it in the contemporary art world post-Duchamp! We are in another space in which images are linked directly to activities and not to history.

**GK:** Your closing sentence offers a new visual explanation to an understanding of art. Is there a difference in reading images “linked directly to activities” and those linked to history?

**AK:** In Morocco, certain activities and attitudes have been the same for hundreds of years, especially in the old towns and mountains! When I talk about images as linked to activities and not to history, it is an idea that follows a feeling, a sensitive feeling that comes from a visual experience.

It could seem a little bit old fashioned to talk about this poetic of images as distant from history, but it is what makes many people resistant to direct political messages. When you see advertisements on big panels in the street, the image could be a photo of a product like Coca Cola or the King of a country. These products share the same spaces in terms of direct messages, but people don't see the symbols anymore! They drink Coca Cola even if it is “American”... the King is the King.

The same photograph of Coca Cola or the King could be in a different context and what would change is the visual, not the history! Yes, we are in a period where images have a small effect, paradoxically, or they have to be more and more strong, like Hiroshima or 9/11, to be linked to history...

**GK:** Do you feel people are equally desensitized to art images? As I understand, it's not a matter of being creative with the image, but with the context itself. You have referred to examples of art in public spaces in Morocco, so has art gone public in search of a context? Did artists lead and curators follow, or was it the other way around? If the museum and gallery concept, as we know it, is inadequate to serve the needs of the art community in Morocco due to cultural, historical and social parameters, what is the role they play in the Moroccan art history?

**AK:** The art images are not as insistent as the advertisement images and they are never shown in the same spaces, only because advertising space is very expensive. I have a very interesting anecdote about the occupation of public space by the commercial advertising, or propaganda: I had the idea to show videos and photos in the train station in Rabat because people wait a long time for trains (I had the idea because I was also waiting for a train and I would rather spend that time seeing art). Sometime after, I wrote a proposal and I went to the Ministry that is in charge of the stations in Morocco. When I presented the project to the first secretary of the Minister, her reaction was, “Very interesting and good idea... We could rent these spaces for advertisements...” I left the Minister's office and never returned to ask them again. A few months later I started seeing advertisement panels in all the train stations in Morocco!

Galleries and museums as we know them do exist in Morocco, as in many other countries, but as inadequate places or exclusive spaces. These places were colonial remnants, like the art schools. Morocco after independence did not build any schools after the two built in Tétouan by the Spanish and in Casablanca by French colonial government. These places play an important role today as other systems are working on the colonial heritage machine (politics and military...).

The official role for museums today is to develop tourism. The few national galleries have no artistic directors. Their schedule is planned by the Minister of Culture and they give the space to artists based on their careers, not their artistic projects.

I invited an artist, Chourouk Hriech, for a residency in order to prepare a specific project for L'appartement 22. After a first residency, she wanted to do a project for a fountain in the street in front of L'appartement 22, but also in front of the Moroccan Parliament which is across the street, separated by palm tree alleys. In the end, we couldn't organize the project, but only a few months later the same fountain was occupied by popular music concerts organized by Maroc Telecom and the fountain was covered by advertisements with the inscription “le talent nous on y croit” (talent, we believe in it).

Personally, I am more attached to the experience of spaces over the references of those places. Peter Brook worked on empty space because action could happen anywhere, but Brook took the aesthetic to a theatre for an existing audience. In visual art, we have to think about a pertinent curatorial approach in the context where works appear, where artist meets public. I

don't believe that art can continue to be made in museums and galleries as we know them. These conventional spaces are the receptacle for ready-made art for spectators, not a public.

**GK:** In the 1960s, *Souffles Quarterly Review* provided artists, writers and poets with a platform where the creative identity of Morocco unfolded. In 2007, it sounds like there is a need for a middle space that is neither the post-colonial western model, nor the exclusively public space. You have founded L'appartement 22, a space that fills that gap between the two — among other projects you have initiated. Tell me about how L'appartement 22 came to be, and how do you deal with these “middle” spaces literally and metaphorically in your curatorial and theoretical work.

**AK:** The idea of a middle space could open a new place for expression and exchange in general. The middle is not necessarily the center, but more a situation of “aller-retours” (goings and comings) between different spaces, cultural and political. When L'appartement 22 began in October 2002, it was not with explicitly radical intentions, although such radicality exists within many of the artistic projects themselves. My role is not that of a mediator, and I therefore don't place restrictions on the artist or the work due to political/social taboos.

As for Souffles, etc., the cultural movements in the 1960s are situated in another era! Today we are in a “post-contemporary” era. The difference between these moments is the relationship to geopolitics as well as the relationship to the global art world and to the images that are increasingly physically present in our daily lives. During the contemporary post-colonial era, history was not the same in Europe as in Africa! The cultural movements that led to Souffles and other spaces are specific to that post-colonial period. After a period of experimenting with and pushing the limits of creative expression, notably by adopting a political position that denounced colonialism as well as the subsequent political systems that succeeded it in Morocco, these movements were quickly marginalized and their members exiled or imprisoned. What has not changed, however, is the political power's inability to support its citizens as “créateurs engagés” and to integrate their artistic projects into its official cultural action.

What these movements in the 1960s proposed was more tied to exclusively ideological ideas than to universal ones. At the time, it was necessary to position oneself in a world, that was beginning to accelerate the circulation of both ideas and people.

Today, we live in a post-contemporary era in the sense that resistance becomes increasingly problematic because it is no longer tied to community interests or to clearly demarcated borders. In spite of the constraints (political, social, economic, etc.), we are in spaces without borders. An artist from Cairo works in New York and exhibits in Rabat or Dakar without changing anything in his work. We are on the same planet which risks exploding because of over-production. Art is not immune to this over-production...

Today, I am considering stopping L'appartement 22 as a place of artistic production due to these ecological concerns.

**GK:** You're a researcher, publisher and curator, with which of the aforementioned roles do you have a short and long-term commitment and why?

**AK:** The relationship to art, artists and events is possible in various frames, material and immaterial, but also in memory. For me, different activities in different media act to translate an idea into reality. It's a cooperative effort to make things happen. Each activity has a different temporality. Research\* is an experience and Curatorial work\* is a result of meetings.

Publishing is the support of communication for the two aforementioned roles. Today, I am more interested in producing art with an ethical idea. I intend to work with artists more in the utopia of art, rather than the market. There is no ideal place to work with these three complementary activities, the idea of the museum is also relative and I believe that art should create its own space, and not the reverse. **BP**

## Notes:

- \* See Le Bout Du Monde project <http://lebdm.free.fr>
- \* See L'appartement 22 [www.appartement22.com](http://www.appartement22.com)
- \* See Les édition hors'champs

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# Marketing Alternative Strategies: The New Model of Artist-Run Spaces in Berlin

interview with Hannah Beck-Mannagetta (FIELD, Berlin) by Beate Engl

**Beate Engl:** Recently we spoke about the new model of Berlin-based *Produzentengalerie* – an artist-run space with a hired arts administrator – and I was both astonished and fascinated how an alternative strategy became a commercial model for self-organized artists dealing with the art market. What is so special about this *Produzentengalerie*?

**Hannah Beck-Mannagetta:** I think special about the quite successful new model is what you already adumbrated within your question. It is a way of being more professional, to use this self-organized strategy to announce the artists to the public, and to establish them on the art-market by using art management tools and dividing competencies (having a gallery manager, using public relations, etc.). It has something to do with realizing that you can't ignore the commercial aspect of art. But this does not mean to be uncritical or to produce what the art market expects or what can be sold easily. The artistry is to find the suitable target group for the individual artwork.

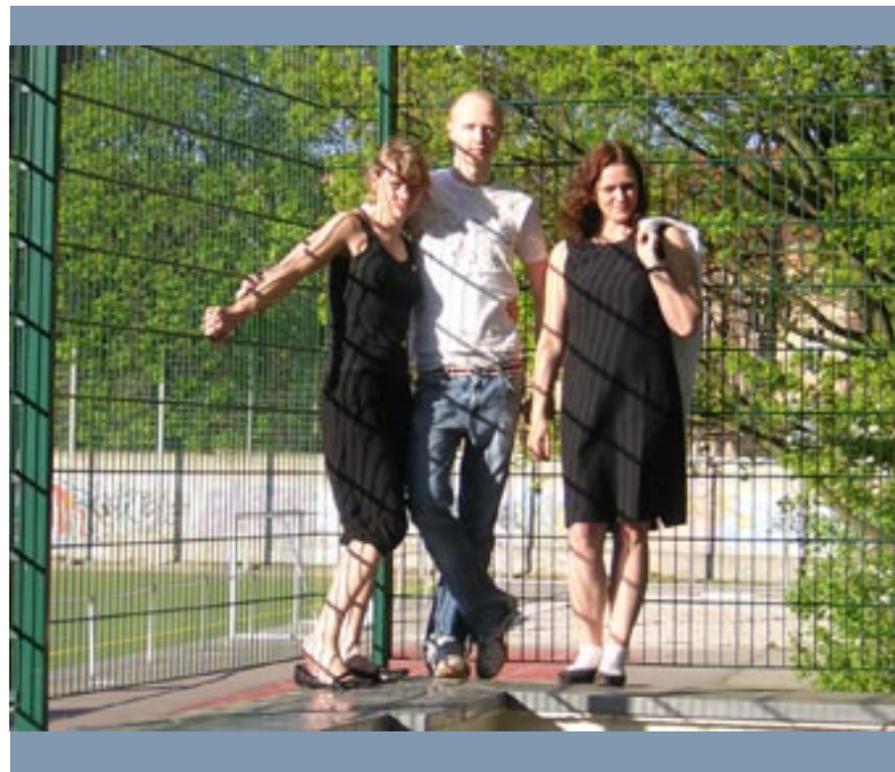
**BE:** To describe more precisely what this model of *Produzentengalerie* means, could you talk about a concrete example of how these kinds of spaces are developed and run, what are the working conditions for the artists and what is the exact role of the art manager / art administrator?

**HBM:** Yes, in the beginning the common method is that a group of artists, let's say ten to twenty, give the same amount of money per month to finance the space and to hire a manager. In some cases the manager will also share the expenses. Then, the group works out contracts about what will happen when some of the works sell. That means splitting the risk and being autonomous from a potent financier. The role of the manager is to do the same job as a gallerist. He or she socializes with collectors and curators, organizes the PR and runs the gallery in total. After about two years they have a look at how the model is working out. Since some of the artists find commercial galleries, the *Produzentengalerie* decides with which artists they will continue to work, and tries to get the gallery into international art fairs. In some cases, the *Produzentengalerie* space will close and the managers will open a new space following the model of a usual commercial gallery.

**BE:** Sounds like a pretty commercial marketing strategy to me, although it is artist-initiated – almost like a mimicry strategy towards the art market. And obviously it is successful – as you said – because after getting enough attention, the artist-run spaces are turned into "real" galleries and the exhibited (paying) artists find their place inside the market. Is this still an alternative strategy or is this just using the so-called "alternative" as a marketing strategy?

**HBM:** There are a few so-called *Produzentengalerien*, which are secretly supported by a big commercial gallery, thus exploiting the model as an experimental ground. However, this is always kept close-lipped. But I don't know if you can really say in general that the *Produzentengalerie* is just a simple marketing strategy using an alternative label because most of the time it is the first chance for the artists to exhibit at all. Not to mention, when the gallery is successful, the artists get their money back.

From another perspective, it is like every other business: what matters is the law of supply and demand and the skill of being able to make your product familiar and attractive. This is a possibility to break through the vicious circle of being denied a grant because you have no exhibition, and having no exhibition because you have been denied a grant. And besides, collectors, curators and museum people get to know the artists and their work.



From left to right: Hannah Beck-Mannagetta, Sven Schuch, Barbara Blickensdorff, FIELD, Berlin 2007

**BE:** Do you think that the city — Berlin, as the capital for young experimental, alternative art practices — plays a role for this model to function so well? In Munich, from my point of view, no international young artist would exhibit if he/she would have to pay rent for the space. This would never be as promising as a show in Berlin.

**HBM:** For sure, Berlin is a hot spot, but there are hardly any potent financiers or collectors in the city, so it is important to gain international attention to survive. Berlin was always a platform to try out new and unusual models. There is a lot of willingness for trial and error.

**BE:** That's true, and in fact I am both fascinated and skeptical about this model. It is trying to deal with the existing conditions of the market like a trickster, but at the same time affirming its rules. But of course artists are used to engaging with difficult situations and finding solutions, especially in Berlin.

When we talked about your first proposal for "FIELD" you were using the model of the *Produzentengalerie* in a different way, transforming it to a curatorial strategy with a special thematic focus. The space you chose is a former gallery in Berlin-Mitte (the hot spot in Berlin for commercial galleries), a very ambitious site for an experimental venture. Is this the professional version of the *Produzentengalerie* and how would you say it is different from a commercial gallery?

**HBM:** When we started to think about our concept for an exhibition space, we did not think about the finances because our first

intention was to create a space with a thematic focus, as opposed to galleries working with a specific media, or with none at all. We wanted to give emerging artists working on a specific subject— in our case the "human body" — the opportunity to present their work to the public in a wide range of artistic media. Our special interest was to initiate a critical, interdisciplinary discourse between the various media of visual arts, performance, cultural studies, and medi-

we have decided to run every single exhibition project for six weeks instead of four, in order to work harder to realize our aims in art education and artist publicity. Now it will take one and a half years or a little longer. We chose the theme because all of us have a specific relationship to it apart from our knowledge and experience in visual arts. Sven Schuch studied dramatics, especially dance theory, and is a dancer himself; Barbara Blickensdorff has been learning "Alexander Technique," a reflexive body technique, for three years now; and I studied cultural studies with a focus on the tabooed body and the body in photography. The "human body" is an inherently interdisciplinary subject and it allows everyone individual access to the theme because everyone has a relationship to his/her body. Consciously or unconsciously, he/she uses it and has a specific image of the "human body" in general.

**BE:** What are the specific contents you want to present along with the art projects?

**HBM:** There are many quite different themes connected with the body, for example: (de)construction of the body, body staging, social bodies, the body as media, physical ecstasy, the virtual body, urban occupation of the body, body connotations, or the preoccupation with identity, mirror image and silhouette, and emotional condition of the body.

But to give a specific example, we have framed an exhibition project called *Vertigo* with one of our artists, Christl Mudrak. She will be doing an installation using spirals so that the visitor is disorientated in the room and feels a kind of dizziness. In the accompanying program we have invited natural scientists, dancers and other theorists and practitioners dealing with vertigo. We will organize discussions, workshops (with kids as well as with adults), performances, and film screenings around this topic.

**BE:** Your first exhibition will be a curated group show in which you present some of the chosen artists to the public. It is called "Reich und Schön müssen leider draussen bleiben." If you want to keep out "the rich and the pretty" — the typical kind of people moving along Auguststraße searching for hip art openings in their worn-out Prada shoes — then what is your target audience?

**HBM:** We are opening the group exhibition a few days before the Art Forum Berlin and other art fairs and international events are starting in the city. This is a good time to be seen from the international scene, but it was quite important for us to give an ironic hint that there is something different going on at "FIELD" than a financial investment or a gallery selling decorative art. It won't keep out these people and it ought not to. We are sure to interest and surprise everybody. Last but not least, the title refers to our body topic within the first exhibition.

**BE:** Good luck for your opening! "FIELD" is located in Auguststraße 65, Berlin-Mitte.**BP**

cal/academic research in the areas of movement, body, perception, and society. To us, art education and public relations means creating broader public access to art and the relevant issues with which it is dealing. This not only means theoretically in the form of speech, but also in physical/mental activity. When we were searching for the artists, it turned out that we worked like curators. We chose artists that fit the theme, work in artistic methodologies of dialogue, use artistic concepts that cross boundaries of cognition and sensual perception, and extend the structures of media and content. The artists we are now going to work with did not know each other before, they are from different countries, and not all of them are based in Berlin, so we recognized that we could not communicate a feeling of "we are one family and everyone is responsible for everyone." That does not mean the artists do not appreciate the work of the others, but we decided to finance each exhibition project individually. That means more risk for us, but also more freedom for our work, and it is better suited to the concept.

**BE:** Curating a collective or collective process seems to be a highly difficult undertaking, and the shift you made with "FIELD" towards a conceptual space totally makes sense. You chose a rather strict thematic focus on the "human body" for a certain period of time, and you are trying to investigate on various interdisciplinary levels. How did this common theme develop among you and your co-curators?

**HBM:** In the beginning, we planned to run the project space under the theme of the "human body" for only one year, but now

# "If this exhibition doesn't wake them up, it's not my fault!"

interview with Halil Altindere by Isil Egrikavuk



photo: courtesy of Halil Altindere

Born in Mardin/ Turkey in 1971, Halil Altindere lives and works in Istanbul. He is the publisher and editor-in-chief of *art-ist* Contemporary Art Magazine, Istanbul.

#### Selected Group Shows:

2007, Documenta 12, Kassel, Germany, 2006, "Art, Life and Confusion", October Salon, Belgrade, Serbia. 2005, "Istanbul", 9th International Istanbul Biennial, Turkey, 1998, "Roteiros" 24th International Sao Paulo Biennial, Sao Paulo, Brazil.

#### Curatorial Practice:

2007 "Be a Realist, Demand the Impossible!", Karsi Sanat Calismalari, Istanbul, 2005 "Free Kick" Hospitality zone of 9th Istanbul Biennial, Antrepo:5 Istanbul, Turkey. 2003 "I Am Too Sad To Kill You!", Proje 4L Istanbul Museum of Contemporary Art, Turkey. 2002 "I am bad and I Am Proud!", Refika, Istanbul, Turkey.

**Isil Egrikavuk:** Halil you started off as an artist, then added curating to your career. Can you talk about why? What void does your work fill in Turkey?

**Halil Altindere:** As a producer of art I don't make exhibitions just for the sake of making an exhibition or as a result of a request coming from a gallery or institution. The main thing that pushes me to make an exhibition is my discomfort with exhibitions in the local scene, and the desire to see an alternative. Sometimes only two or three works will affect me, but will be the spark for an exhibition with thirty or forty artists. So far, the three exhibitions we have made happened like this. For me, another important part is that I do not give artists a concept in advance, I title the exhibition through the works that affect, excite and provoke me during the preparation process and through the energy of the selections I make.

With privatization of culture in Turkey after 2000, and as a result of capital's discovery of contemporary art, the capital has started to place itself and its current global capitalist structure on a more legitimate basis. This situation has unavoidably caused artists to search for new ways and to take new positions. Also after 2000 the investment of capital into contemporary art through PR companies created museums without an identity, eclectic collections and fake exhibitions in which clueless curators legitimize capital's eclectic and personal collections.

The exhibition I am working on now, entitled *Be a Realist, Demand the Impossible!* is taking place between October 19th-November 17th in Istanbul Karsi Sanat Calismalari, with the participation of 41 young artists. Rather than

talking about the works one by one, or the works as a whole, this exhibition is a curatorial strategy suggesting that the artist take his or her individual guard, find a position and display a choice towards the system in the contemporary art environment that has been corporatized after 2000.

**IE:** I conclude from your answer that there are two opposing sides. The system itself and a position against it. Let's be more specific when we say "the system." What makes the system something to be against? Galleries that operate with funding from banks, curators looking for jobs, and young artists looking for exposure... These people or institutions are potentially part of the system, too. They probably have the same opinions and perhaps tactics of benefiting from the system while standing in opposition to it. In this way, who are we really against while talking about the "system," seeming as if we are in, but thinking as if we are out? Is it possible we are our own enemy?

**HA:** What I am talking about is not an inside and outside binary opposition. I am interested in how artists that are within the system are positioning themselves. Currently, both local and international art markets are part of the global capitalist system due to their economic relationship with the market. In a time where the system is feeding its opposites and accepting them, it is pointless to say artists, critics, and curators are not part of the system. They are also, as you are saying, cultural workers of this system.

Artists should be careful about making concessions for their beliefs. One concession could lead to another, and eventually they give up their entire position.

The art world, in which extreme success is causing artists to become nauseous, has created two types of artists: First, there are artists that have thrown themselves into the arms of the system through the dizziness of their success, while the others have selected from the recipes they have been given. The first group accepts everything without knowing how to say no, they are the obedient ones, their heads are down... Today's artists are fighting for acceptance by the system instead of fighting against it. *Be a Realist, Demand the Impossible!* is pointing to this paradoxical situation.

**IE:** Your work is often a direct response to situations, or ideas that you are uncomfortable with. Doesn't this strategy in fact, with an opposite effect, put you in a victim position?

**HA:** In all the exhibitions I have made, I have received different responses, either from the art community or the government and the ones in power (conservative and racist criticism, exhibition catalogues being confiscated,

or the curator being taken to court with article 301, accused of inciting insult, and encouraging the artists to insult). While fighting with the system artists and curators should consider many things, whatever the results may be. Sometimes a hero, sometimes a victim... As Alexander Brener and Barbara Schurz say, there are a lot of artists and curators walking around contently, with dead brains, in a sleep. And if this exhibition doesn't wake them up, it is not my fault! In order to get rid of stupidity, the stupid themselves should make an effort.

**IE:** Can you talk about your relationship with galleries and museums in Istanbul? What are your criteria for working with an institution?

**HA:** I have been in the art world professionally for 10 years. I have never participated in a private or bank gallery exhibition in Istanbul. I've never had a solo show. I don't have a contract with any gallery in Turkey or anywhere else. I am not against selling artwork, but I am trying to keep my distance from the commercial system. They try to keep their distance from me, too. Mutual restraint, I think...

But this doesn't mean that I don't work with any gallery or institution. I consider participating when it is the right time, people and context. Sometimes I participate in shows for support. In 2001, I took part in Proje 4L Istanbul Contemporary Art Museum's first opening *Becoming a Place* curated by Vasif Kortun. This year I participated in Istanbul Modern's *Highlights From 20 Years of Istanbul Biennial* co-curated by David Elliot and Rosa Martinez. Also, I exhibited three works that I made at the end of the 90s and haven't showed before in Santral Istanbul's *1950-2000* exhibition curated by Fulya Erdemci.

In 2002, I curated *I Am Bad and I am Proud of It* at Refika Restaurant (with 6 artists); in 2003, *I Am Too Sad To Kill You* at Proje 4L (with 37 artists); and in 2005, *Free Kick* at Antrepo (with 34 artists).

Both in my art production and curatorial practice, the most important criteria is concept, artists, space, and a relationship of the works.

**IE:** So far you participated in the Istanbul (in 1997 and 2005), Sao Paulo (1998), Gwangju (2002) and Cetinje (2004) Biennials and Manifesta (2002). This year you participated in Documenta both as an artist and as a publisher (with *art-ist* magazine). These large-scale exhibitions, while giving exposure to under-represented countries, do they exoticize them? How does participating in these exhibitions affect the artist and the production? Can you talk through your work in Documenta?

**HA:** The two oldest Biennials, Venice and Sao Paulo, have pavilions based on country representation. These country pavilions are determined by each country and imprison the artist into politics of geography, ethnicity and representation. I haven't participated in biennial

exhibitions based on country representation. I have taken part in biennials based on artist representation. The risk of being exoticized that you are talking about is more in the case of biennials with pavilions I guess.

In the 1990s, with the effect of globalism and as a result of the increasing speed of international circulation, we saw the appearance of many biennials on different continents. Again, these big scale international exhibitions have created two types of artists, those that stepped from the biennial into the big commercial galleries, and the ones that chose to be independent, keeping their circulation without being commercial.

The era in which artists moved to big cities in the west to prove themselves has ended a long time ago. The fight for being the center among western cities has ended too. Today everywhere is in the position of the center.

The questions of Documenta were ideas such as this decentralization, locality and forms of local resistance, bringing together different cultural productions among different modernities, comparing them and producing new questions.

I made my video *Dengbejs* for Documenta through the framework of one of Documenta's conceptual questions "Is modernity our antiquity?" In an age where every kind of digital recording is available for sharing, *Dengbejs* analyzes the function of oral storytelling that began in Mesopotamia before the alphabet's birth. The absurd relationship between the structure of the building where the video has been shot, modernity, post-modernity and antiquity is being underlined.

**IE:** A heavy-weight artist, a curator, and a publisher... You have several roles in Turkey. My last question to you, how do you see your role in the local scene for now and for the future?

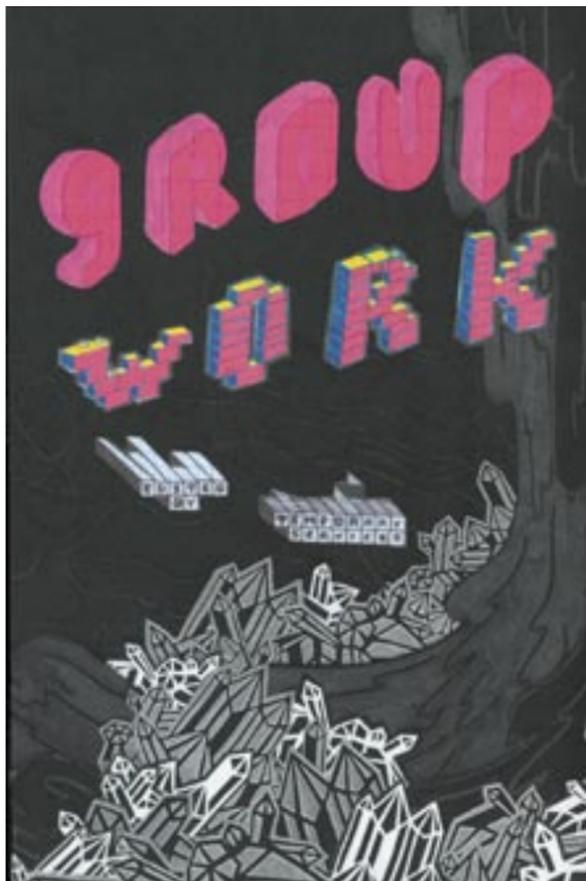
**HA:** The important thing is to have the chance to work with a group of young writers, artists and editors that believe in collective production both in art, curatorial practice and publishing during a time when career-oriented, individualized corporatization among curators and artists is being felt intensely.

The result of the thing that is made doesn't always have to be "successful." You can turn the gun against the system with projects that accept failure against the nausea of extreme success. Just like the curatorial strategy of our first exhibition "I am bad and I am proud of it!"...

In an age where everything is changing and turning into something else, either in *art-ist* contemporary art magazine, or in my curatorial practice, I don't have premonitions for the uncertainty of the past or the future. I mostly think about what is "here" and "now." **BP**

# Proximity to Politics: A Review of Three Recent Published Dialogues on Contemporary Art and Activism

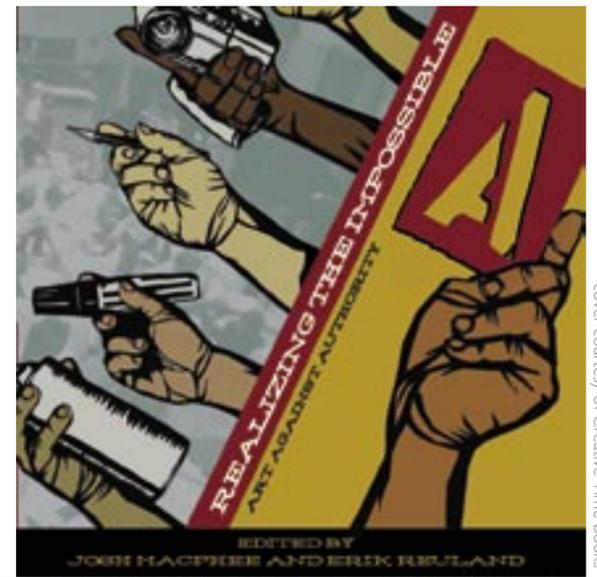
by Daniel Tucker



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In an attempt to broadly survey the current terrain of contemporary art in relationship to politics, I am turning to three invaluable new resources published in the last year. There are three important conversations that have been recorded in the last year and published in book form that I will focus on in order to shed some light on the current challenges facing contemporary artists who are concerned with commenting on and participating in politics. They are:

*"Subversive Multiples: A Conversation between contemporary printmakers"* by Meredith Stern with responses by Icky A., Morgan F.P. Andrews, Courtney Dailey, Josh MacPhee, Colin Matthes, Roger Peet, Erik Ruin, Nicole Shulman, Miriam Klein Stahl, Shaun Slifer, Chris Stain, Swoon, Pete Yahnke, and Bec Young. Featured in *"Realizing The Impossible: Art Against Authority"* edited by Josh MacPhee and Erik Reuland (AK Press 2007)

*"War Culture"* with Doug Ashford Moderating a conversation between Gregg Bordowitz, Paul Chan, Peter Eleey, Deborah Grant, K8 Hardy, Sharon Hayes, Emily Jacir, Ronak Kapadia, Steve Kurtz, Julian LaVerdiere, John Menick, Helen Molesworth, Anne Pasternak, Ben Rodriguez-Cubenas, Ralph Rugoff and Nato Thompson. Published as the final of 3 conversations in *"Who Cares"* (Creative Time Books 2006).

*"Political Art Documentation/Distribution (PAD/D) Interview"* by Brett Bloom with PAD/D members Gregory Sholette, Janet Koenig, Jerry Keams, and Barbara Moore. Published in *"Group Work: A book of information and dialogs about creativity and collaboration in groups"* by Temporary Services (Printed Matter, Inc. 2007).

The reason why these rich conversations are useful for my observation is because they are all equally ambitious efforts, attempting to simultaneously record collective histories, articulate the concerns of a moment in time and be inclusive of conflicting and contradictory viewpoints. Additionally, because of the ambition and rigor of the participants and organizers, my text cannot be seen as a complete summary of all the issues and ideas raised in these dialogues. My goal is to make observations based on these dialogues and use them as an illustration of a wide range of perspectives—much wider than any one conversation would be alone, or than any gathering/discussion that I could orchestrate myself. These resources are invaluable, and you should all certainly check out the books in their entirety if the questions I raise here compel you at all.

These dialogues are in service of different audiences, and likely the participants know little about each other, but they are more similar than you might imagine. Read together, they provide a

unique insight into a diverse group of U.S.-based cultural producers' perspectives on what it means to be effective, how and why artists might organize themselves, and what kinds of groups and institutions that artists can, should and shouldn't collaborate with. I will now elaborate on some of the similarities and differences between these conversations in order to discuss them in an interrelated context.

The *Subversive Multiples* and the *War Culture* conversations both bring together a group of artists who do not work together or even necessarily know one another to reflect on present day questions, while the *Political Art Documentation/Distribution* interview is made up of three separate conversations with four members of the early 1980s art network of the same name (PAD/D).

The *War Culture* and PAD/D interviews are similar in that they deal mostly with New York City-based artists who are generally connected enough to either the academic theory or art universe to experience a certain heightened level of mobility. However, there are certainly participants in the *Subversive Multiples* conversation who have enjoyed their share of commercial art or academic success, while some adhere strictly to punk or other subculture communities and marginal economies.

The PAD/D and *Subversive Multiples* conversations share a focus on simple means or forms and participatory production, implicitly identifying their roles as participants in social and political movements. On the other hand, *War Culture* deals primarily with artists who require significant financial support to produce their work. A portion of the *War Culture* conversation is actually focused on reforming arts funding while the rest primarily deals with what many participants observe as a lack of grassroots art and activism in New York City, but their positions in relationship to social and political movements vary greatly.

The objective of the *War Culture* conversation was to be explicit about working during war time; the *Subversive Multiples* conversation was an attempt to survey and introduce a recently emergent community of activist printmakers of anti-authoritarian political leanings; and the PAD/D members were interviewed to shed light on their history and the history of related NYC art activist groups of the last 40 years—their group process and their active archiving of the work (mostly posters) of thousands of international artists who dealt with political content during their existence from 1980-1988.

*War Culture*' moderator Doug Ashford describes, "The Who Cares conversations would be justified in themselves, separate

from any use they might have in the future; and separate, certainly, even from their potential publication. The discussions were justified simply in the bringing together of individuals in a temporary space of mutuality."

The three areas of concern which will allow me to interpret the concerns and objectives of the artists participating in these conversations and make broad generalizations about tendencies in art as it relates to politics are *economy*, *political movements* and the *evaluation of efficacy*. I will now quote, compare and contrast the engagement with these categories of social life according to their appearance in the above mentioned conversations.

## Economy

*"I think of the time that we made the RNC map, The People's Guide to the Republican National Convention... We weren't going to wait for a grant. We robbed, lied and stole for that money," Paul Chan reflected during War Culture.*

In reading these conversations together, I was able to get a sense that money isn't an easy thing for anyone to discuss now. It generally isn't with most people I know, and so I cannot imagine that it would be that different for artists. The pickle seems to be that while everyone participating in these conversations is politically Left and has an analysis that presumes that capitalism structures social life and economies in such a way that is unbearable to most people, everyone has different ways that they have to participate in the system or the logic of capitalism on a daily basis. In other words, the people whose voices are represented in these conversations all work within and participate in capitalism through their labor and consumption everyday. The main difference between them is how they interpret that participation as being part of the "problem." The other main concern that is interrelated is that of funding—how is your work funded, or how is a general movement or community financially supported.

The printmakers in *Subversive Multiples* talk explicitly and honestly about the sale of artwork. While some of the artists focus on the way that it feels to sell something as a negative way of relating to others, or as being a matter of "conscious." Others reflect on the positive aspects of supporting yourself through your work. Swoon, the only participant with NYC gallery representation that can offer regular pay, speaks candidly about her working history: "I was a waitress for a lot of years and when the opportunity started to present itself for me to be supported by the things I was already doing, and loved, I was very ready.... I hate the idea of what I am making being nar-

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rowed down to its value as an object for investment or sale. On the other hand, selling art has allowed me to realize larger and more difficult projects...” In response to the same question, Josh MacPhee comments “Unfortunately, we live in a society where the dominant economic model is one where the value of things is defined by how much you can sell them for. This isn’t a good thing, but I’m not a purist. I sell art because I don’t know how else to survive while making it.” He goes on to say that most of his work sells as prints for \$5-\$50.

It should be stated that with some exceptions, the *War Culture* participants are more directly tied to the professional art world, funded by sales, teaching fees and foundation grants. This funding dynamic is the often unspoken context in which most of the participants make reference to economies, with almost no explicit assessment of how capitalism structures their lives or practices. Gregg Bordowitz argues, “Now is the time to fund things that cannot necessarily be proven, to reaffirm the notion of art as an experimental field, and to allow for a great deal of uncertainty over what the people you are funding do.” In addition to a long conversation about the possibility of reforming the funding practices of cultural institutions and foundations, the discussion takes a turn towards the issue of space and real estate, and the economic struggle most cultural producers (even those with ties to elite institutions) often face just to stay in the city. The participants speculated on what impact this competitive climate may or may not have on the existence of critical practices in NYC.

*War Culture* moderator Doug Ashford states, “The market dominated the early 80s, it was a gigantic art sale, and it was junk bond world — a market explosion. But there were also artists taking over buildings, there was Group Material, there were artists working dialogically in the Bronx and Brooklyn, there were people going to Cuba and Nicaragua and working with unions and activist groups and coming back and starting formal experiments, there was public theater, grassroots health campaigns and client-based ‘educational movements.’ I’m not saying its great right now, I’m just saying I think it’s a little bit too easy to blame this lack of cultural activism on market domination. We had a junk bond art world in the 80s and there was experimentation. There’s experimentation now that goes undocumented.”

What is surprising to me is how few examples of contemporary cultural activism the participants in the Who Cares conversation are able to muster. With few exceptions, the participants seem to have a genuine difficulty identifying compelling and worthwhile practices currently taking place, even in their hometown of New York City.

The issue of accessing models and documents that can assist in generating this kind of memory is exemplified with the *PAD/D* interview. Gregory Sholette admits in the end that they are very glad that the *PAD/D* archive of thousands of political art documents of the 1980s is now housed in a place with the resources that can take care of it, but finds it a double edged sword to work with the Museum of Modern Art which is a very “corporatized institution.” Still, the legacy of *PAD/D* has to be read in relationship to the early 1980s economy. There was an affordable housing crisis, which had emerged in the late 1970s that was still making waves in NYC, and there was this emergent art market that promised to eat up anything in its path. The *PAD/D* members reflect on their legacy and why they think their work was influential, but not entirely absorbed into the art world or art history. Gregory Sholette comments “*PAD/D* in less direct ways, and Group Material perhaps more overtly, did alter the art world landscape in favor of ‘political art’. In some ways you can say that we were the victims of our own success because by the end of the 1980s, everybody wanted to do political art. However, it had lost its connection to activism and to broader political issues.” Barbara Moore from *PAD/D* continues this line of thinking by reflecting on *PAD/D*’s legacy and the progressive popularity of political cultural work and art since their heyday, “It’s interesting to see how it gets into the broader public consciousness and the mainstream. And eventually, no matter how subversive you are, 90% of the time, somebody will find a way of marketing it.”

## Political Movements

“Our goal was to become involved more directly with cultural activism as part of direct political action. We saw the need to become part of the community-based organizations in the city. We wanted to directly use our art as a political tool in support of progressive causes,” states Jerry Kearns from the *PAD/D* interview.

It is in this field of questions—art’s relationship to political movements—that surprisingly dramatic differences are demonstrated by our case study discussions.

From *PAD/D*, Jerry Kearns and Gregory Sholette elaborate on the links between their group and the New Left of the late 1960s and early 70s that is commonly associated with student activism and national independence struggle. Sholette describes their organizational structure:

“I think that, in general, we did inherit some of the structure from previous groups... The model was a kind of Leninism with pastel shades. But as much as artists try to be disciplined in a radical revolutionary sense, it is not very sustainable. But there was definitely a kind of organized self-control there... One of the reasons for that was Jerry Kearns, who had come from a group that Amiri Baraka had founded called the Anti-Imperialist Cultural League. It was very much a Leninist-Maoist style, 1970s splinter group from the New Left/SDS era.”

In *War Culture*, participant Nato Thompson argues for artists’ participation in protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO), Paul Chan discusses his connection to Christian leftists protesting wars and torture, and Gregg Bordowitz recalls the transformative moments of being a video producer in the 1980s working with AIDS activist network ACT-UP.

Surprisingly, the printmaker’s conversation deals the least with actual participation in social movements. Despite working collaboratively with other artists in art collectives, these artists had very little to say about organized politics—except for being incredibly suspicious of anything that would be perceived as having any answers or authority. An exception is Eric Ruin’s response to historical quotations about the role of art in revolution, where he comments, “I’d be excited to see more work either envisioning the future of our society, playing a direct instructive role in revolutionary struggle, or both.”

## Evaluation of Efficacy

“How do you gauge the effectiveness of your work? For you, does this relate to your ability to express yourself? Does it relate to how the audience sees your work?” asks moderator Meredith Stern to the printmakers.

It’s hard to evaluate how effective something is if you don’t know what the goals are. And it’s hard to evaluate something if a significant portion of its objective in being created is actually part of a messy and intangible social process. The printmakers in *Subversive Multiples* reflect in their conversation motives for creating art in the first place: “To create a sense of possibility,” says Pete Yahnke; “Enrapture and enrage,” Roger Peet; “To tell stories of the forgotten, the underrepresented or the voiceless,” Colin Matthes.

These motives tend towards creating an affective impact, which is hard to evaluate. Did your art create a sense of possibility? Sure. Did it enrapture and enrage? Sure. Did it tell stories of the voiceless? Sure. Did any of these experiences move the viewer to action, to educate him or herself, to make more art? This is most likely not going to be answered.

Josh MacPhee says, “On the one hand, by claiming a piece of art is political, it takes it out of the realm of ‘pretty pictures’ and adds some element of utility. Once there is a claim of utility, you can’t avoid wanting to quantify that, to define what works or what doesn’t. Otherwise, what’s the point of claiming politics? At the same time, art can’t be boiled down to purely quantifiable factors; it is and always will be qualitative, that’s what makes it art.”

Gregg Bordowitz echoes recent critiques of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex put forth in the book *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* during the *War Culture* conversation, by saying that we have lost ourselves to quantification based analysis of what is effective in our work because of funding streams. He says, “We accepted the corporate cultural inclusion into the independent world and slowly gave over the notion of legitimizing our activity according to quantification, revenue production, and efficacy models that were totally inappropriate to emerging political activities or radical art making.”

*War Culture* also shows NYC artists discussing relevance and realness. They debate the possibility of working on cultural work outside the logic of the commodity, about who cares what art they make when fucked up shit happens everyday, about meaning making under a dominant meaning making regime run by the State and the Church. They seem to have questions and conflict in regards to scale and effect—what work matters—when and where?

Several questions for *PAD/D* members deal with the legacy of their work specifically. While most members feel that *PAD/D* had a kind of subconscious or subliminal influence on groups and individuals in NYC making self-identified political art and upon the “mainstream embrace of political art in the 1980s and 1990s,” they don’t feel like *PAD/D* received credit for its role in that history. This is partially, occurring to Jerry Kearns because, “Most of mainstream art history takes structure in the recognition of individual achievements which reinforce the market perspective of the system. *PAD/D* did not do that. We did not fit that agenda.”

And what can we learn from this mash-up sampling of three radically different conversations? Should they be read as separate strands, sects or traditions? Should they be read together, as interrelated tendencies? What do people gain from participating in these separate networks and tendencies? If there is a desire to achieve a goal or to organize an effective and functional network of cultural producers committed to engagement with politics, are these differences able to be negotiated or worked through?

One initial step towards answering this might be honesty about what politics is. When I say it, I mean views about social relationships involving authority or power, with specific recognition that capitalist states have a monopoly on the form of power that structures most of our lives. In relation to artistic practices, the political relevance is not as easily understood, as it is in, say, organizing workers or communities, running for government office, or taking direct action to make a point.

These dialogues leave me wondering: How do any of these artists or authors relate to political organizing on a mass or micro-political scale? They are well intentioned, all of them, but missing an honest self-reflection of where they are operating and what can happen in that position, and what could happen if their positions were different. This lack of self-reflection plagues artists and cultural producers interested in being relevant to contemporary politics and power. Being honest about the economies we participate in; our relationship, and potential relationship, to social movements (that are emerging, currently existing or in recent memory); how we want to evaluate our work, in what context we think that evaluation should happen and against what standards—read together, these criteria will give a viewer, a critic, or a participant the capacity to understand the work’s proximity to political concerns. It is through their proximity to politics that we can evaluate the role of these practices and their potential to inform or shape politics. **BP**

## Authors Note:

This text is in its beginning stages and will be elaborated on and expanded in the future. Feel free to contact me if you have any comments or criticism. Eventually the reflections began in this text will be used as an argument for the formation of a national critical art network, and as a warning for the differences that such a network would need to negotiate and possibly resolve if it were to ever actually form.

# The Art of Complaining

interview with Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen of Complaints Choir by Georgia Kotretsos

Artists, Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen tells us of the Finnish *Valituskuoro* expression, which means *Complaints Choir* and describes situations where a lot of people are complaining simultaneously.

It all started with the Birmingham Choir in 2005, when Tellervo and Oliver decided to take the old Finnish idiomatic 12 letter saying literally. The most recent choir, the Chicago Choir took place in early November 2007, yet a total of 13 "Complaints Choirs" have been performed in between the two by over 550 complainers. It's a community project gone wild by giving the act of complaining a stage, a spotlight, and a context.

and get good ideas about how to improve the society. We do feel that the project hits the nerve of many individuals though. The fact that *Valituskuoro* has started some kind of a worldwide phenomenon tells how people have an urge to express their dissatisfaction and at the same time smile for their own endless list of complaints.

**Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen:** I lived for 17 years in East Germany and another 17 years in different countries in Western Europe; the fact is that people complained everywhere. In the East they complained about the lack of choice, in the West about the abundance of choice. Even in Paradise people complained. So, if complaining is symptomatic of anything, it's the

plain about things they have not the slightest influence upon, for example, the weather? Here complaining is not at all about changing things, but rather about building a communal feeling: I am not alone with my little problems, we share the same burden — of a totally unacceptable climate for example...

In Finland we had a lot of complaints about mobile phones: "My friend is more interested in his phone than in me," or "People only tell their opinions via SMS chat rooms." Another big issue was related to the work environment, for example that the boss has much better shoes and jobs are outsourced to China. People in Helsinki were less concerned about the social impact, but the choir in fact did change Finland:

have taken place. On your site [www.complaintschoir.org](http://www.complaintschoir.org) you have a "do-it" page where anyone by following your method can initiate a complaints choir project in their city. You have identified a need in people and have modeled a creative solution that has proven to be easily applied worldwide. As artists how do you feel about the contagious dimensions your project has taken?

**OKK:** It is a very ambivalent feeling. On the one hand it is the best thing that can happen to an artist, that something you have initiated starts to be taken over by the people. People take the matters into their own hands. When we occasionally receive a DVD with a choir performance from somewhere around the



Complaints Choir of Birmingham, 2005

What I enjoy about the project is the loose ends of complaining itself, because it is for minor and also for major personal or public matters. One may complain formally or informally, verbally or in writing, privately or publicly and that's what's interesting. For a culture to have such a pointed, witty expression that describes its complaining society is a linguistic sunny-Sunday outing. To be frank, they had me at *Valituskuoro*!

Read along and visit the **Complaints Choir** website, [www.complaintschoir.com](http://www.complaintschoir.com), to watch the performances. It is an exceptional model of community-based art worth discussing.

**Georgia Kotretsos:** By inviting people to lodge their complaints, to protest, to express their objections, to speak (sing) out, to make a statement of disapproval, to stage that very act and perform it in public, you offer the participants a platform to communicate their petty every-day gripes as well as issues that affect and concern every citizen. You invite them "to take responsibility for their complaints," to stand up straight and face collectively their own reflection. The participants sing together and to one another, they do not exclude themselves from what they are singing about. It's not an act of pointing their finger to a third party but of distributing responsibility first among themselves and then among their listeners. What are your thoughts on the socio-political "*Valituskuoro*" dimensions in practice?

**Tellervo Kalleinen:** In the first place *Valituskuoro* is a great tool for self-reflection. The project embodies the fact that people do put a lot of energy in complaining — and it makes the participants and everybody who gets in touch with the project ask themselves: what do I want to do with this energy?

Sometimes we are asked if we expect that *Valituskuoro* creates changes in the society. We don't expect that politicians listen to the song

incapability of the human species to be unconditionally happy. This is quite well expressed in a line of the Hamburg Complaints Choir; one half of the choir shouts: "I have not enough time!" (Because I am overworked), the other half replies: "I have too much time!" (Because I am unemployed).

We defined complaining as "dissatisfaction without action," nevertheless behind most of the complaints there is an idea or a belief or a value that a person is committed to. Complaints have therefore built-in the potential of being a transformative power. The truth about the revolution in East Germany is that it only happened because a critical mass of people complained about the fact that they cannot buy bananas round the year (only at Christmas) etc. It was a consumer revolution.

That said, we are relieved that not everybody starts a revolution just because they are dissatisfied with their neighbor. We would live in quite unstable times.

It seems evident to us that people would rather complain about their immediate surroundings which impacts everyday life than about abstract political issues. But we disagree with the assumption that a personal complaint is not socially engaged. If somebody complains that he has too much time, it is a very personal thing on one hand, but it also points to a deep flaw of the neoliberal society, namely that people get discarded because there is no use for them in the production flow.

When I asked one participant of the St. Petersburg Complaints Choir why there are hardly any complaints about Putin's regime and so many about (the lack of) romantic relationships, he answered: "What do you think is more important: Putin or Love?" You choose.

There is another fundamental aspect to the culture of complaining. Why do people com-

in the chorus line we complained about the fact that Finland always loses against Sweden in Ice hockey and Eurovision. Just a few weeks later, Lordi of Finland won the Eurovision and the country was healed from a deep trauma.

In Birmingham, there were a lot of complaints about the city—considered to be the asshole of England—since it is very ugly and has a collection of failed urban developments and architectural sins. But in Birmingham we had also a lot of very personal complaints, e.g. some young man complained that his beard wouldn't grow, even though he wanted to be a captain — but a captain without full beard is not taken seriously.

In Hamburg the choir became very political, because it took place in a so-called problem suburb; people saw the chance to address very burning political issues to their city government, one woman even left the choir because for her it was not political enough — she couldn't handle a complaint about broken underwear beside her own "more serious" complaint. The Complaints Choir creates a lot of media attention, and it is through the TV and newspaper interviews with the choir members that a lot of issues actually get aired which otherwise couldn't have been addressed; the project creates a backdoor into the media space.

St. Petersburg's emphasized deep basic human issues like: "I complain about existential horror." Still, the complaints in all four cities were more similar than different; they were all related to a western, urban consumer society.)

**GK:** Since 2005, the Birmingham (2005), the Helsinki (2006), the Hamburg (2006), the St. Petersburg (2006), the Poikkilaasko (2006), the Bodø (2006), the Penn State (2007), the Canada/As it happens (2007), the Juneau (2007), the Cabriola Island (2007), the Jerusalem (2007), the Melbourne (2007), the Budapest (2007), and the Chicago choirs

world, it is always a bit of a touching moment. When we saw for the first time the Poikkilaasko children's choir, I almost had tears in my eyes. Also, I enjoyed following the Budapest Choir, since they really got into it. We were really happy about their public success.

In the beginning we thought that we will just organize the project in one or two cities and that's it. We were surprised how popular the project became. The first "artistic" decision was to put the videos in full length on our website. Tellervo was afraid that this might affect our exhibition activity — who would show the videos, if they are all available online? We found that this is really not the case.

Shortly after that, somebody uploaded the video clips to YouTube and also a lot of blogs wrote about it. Finally, in November 2006, the Birmingham video was featured on the front page of YouTube resulting in a massive increase of traffic to our website, which almost broke down. Then we started to receive a lot of e-mails from people telling us that they would like to organize a choir in their city. It was then we made the second "artistic" decision, to include a DIY section on the website and encourage people to do it. In that way the project became not only a participatory work but in fact a true community work.

With this comes a loss of control over it, but the question is, could we ever control it anyway? In the end this path would mean to register a trademark for "Complaints Choir," maybe even a patent etc., and then we would have to spend all our time to defend our "property." This would run counter to the whole idea of the work — since the choirs are a collaborative effort mainly by volunteers. To maintain a strict copyright would also be in contradiction with our belief in open content.

The downside is that you have to accept people doing a Complaints Choir but missing the

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central points. We had a couple of overconfident musicians, who thought that they could write the lyrics and the song alone and then just hand it to an existing choir.

We also did not like too much when CBS radio organized an all Canada choir, the complaints coming anonymous from radio listeners and then a professional choir hired to perform.

In other occasions we had some people with a pre-fixed agenda, they wanted to do a complaints choir of Berlin, but they already knew beforehand what it all should be about: a protest against the cutting of some trees.

Now I think that it is just great what is happening — and what an interesting experience it has been to loose control to that extent. What else can an artist hope than for the work to live its own life — so strongly that the artist him/herself becomes unimportant?

The enthusiasm of the people organizing a complaints choir must be quite strong because it is a lot of work. If you want to do it in a proper way it requires commitment for quite a long period: minimum three months work from the organizers and three weeks from the participants. By “proper” I mean that you don’t make it just as a joke project with your friends. The idea is that the participants are found through open call — and it is taken care that

own motivation, a personal agenda which lets them overcome all the little hurdles and which brings them to the first meeting. Even though our projects have time limits, it demands quite a lot from the participants in terms of time, energy and involvement.

One important consideration for the invitation is that it should be well formulated. The art lies in saying just enough to grab the attention, to have some goal to focus on, while leaving sufficient room for the imagination. Since we don’t remunerate the participants we can compensate them just with a unique experience, plus a DVD...

ple. Very often you have community projects in which the artist had a great idea, but there is no community interested in the project. It would be wise to skip the project, but often the art institution and/or the artist try to convince people to take part. That is very bad. It is our main principle: never coax anyone into the project. If nobody signs up, nobody cares about it.

The enthusiasm is, of course, the main ingredient that carries the project along. If you would have fifty depressed people singing their boring complaints with a total lack of energy, it would be quite unbearable. So, the enthusiasm transforms the complaining into something powerful.



Complaints Choir of Helsinki, 2006

On other occasions people do it in a rush, they don’t allow enough time for preparation and/or rehearsals. So the choir members are not very familiar with the song, they sing their lines from the sheet and the performance lacks the enthusiasm that is so essential to it.

Also, we did not like so much when the song consisted mainly of solo complaints, and just a general chorus was sung together.

And we don’t like if people don’t drop us a line when they organize a choir. It is so easy to contact us, and we kindly request this on our site.

It was a bit strange when an artist couple organized a complaints choir within a show at Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne. That is a fine place where we would like to have an exhibition ourselves, so that felt a bit weird, but the open content policy says: no discrimination against any profession!

So, egomaniacs, commercialization, pre-fixed agendas, sloppy performances, anti-collectivism, non-attribution, etc. etc... The open approach that we chose provides enough opportunity to grumble and complain, but in the end the great dynamic that this approach allowed and the feedback we have received from those choirs that succeeded far outweighs the difficulties.

**TK:** This has been a very unusual experience and we weren’t prepared for it. Oliver was more ready to go with the wave and support the rising phenomenon from its first moment. I had a harder time struggling with my ego, which was set to the traditional mode of an artist: you have to defend your ideas. These feelings rose to the surface especially when other professional artists started to create complaints choirs in their own countries—or when a big national broadcast company and one big radio station in two different countries organized their own complaints choirs without mentioning where the idea came from.

people from different backgrounds and social classes hear the invitation. Anybody who wants is welcome to the choir. It is also important for us that the final complaints for the song are chosen democratically by the choir members.

**GK:** So, basically we have a community project gone out of hand, in a good way. The fascinating thing is that through this open call voluntary people of “different backgrounds and social classes” who are not necessarily artists are participating in an art project where they are invited to perform. Singing in a choir is not a new idea, but discussing the Complaints Choir within an art context the participants become central figures of this very discussion. Do you feel the participants are aware of the context they’re singing from and how do you read their willingness to come forward with such enthusiasm in regards to community projects that rely on participation?

**OKK:** That is not absolutely exact, since the participation includes also working out the text of the complaints song together with the other participants. It is important that the people understand the song as their song. There are also shared meals and other group-building activities. The final performance is only one aspect of participation.

If you have 50 participants, you most likely have 50 different reasons why people want to participate. Some like singing, others are professional complainers, some are bored with their job and want to do something crazy, someone just takes part because she is interested in the good looking boy that has signed up to the project. Who knows?

We like the idea of an open invitation. Since we don’t have any prior relationship with the people that might respond to the invitation — there is no social pressure in the play — people can ignore, reject or accept the invitation. But when they accept, we are sure they have their



Complaints Choir of Chicago, 2007

**TK:** It is important to me that our art projects don’t stay at the level of a symbolic gesture. Since we do these projects with real people, something should really happen, a group dynamic should develop with real emotions and unpredictability. Otherwise, people would simply become illustrations of our idea. If the result is something that the participants and we could never even have dreamed of doing alone, then we are happy.

**OKK:** Also, we like the idea of invitation because it somehow defines our roles in relation to the participants; it is like an invitation to a party: we are the hosts and we try to create a good atmosphere, but whether or not it is a good party depends largely on the people that come. In defining our roles, we could say that we try to be good party hosts. And we clean up the mess the next morning...

We have sometimes been criticized — particularly with the Complaints Choir — that the participants are not representative of the social texture of the respective cities. This might have something to do with the distribution of our invitation, which was of course not a cleverly conceived marketing campaign with exact data on target groups etc. Instead it was an improvised distribution of newspaper ads, flyers in neighborhoods and a wild e-mailing session. Still, I never felt that the choir represented a homogenous group; as I said before, everybody had their own personal, maybe idiosyncratic, irreducible motivation to take part and created a strong feeling of diversity in the group. That the audience experienced the choir as homogenous has in my view more to do with the group dynamics. We actually managed to create a strong group identity within only three weeks, which might give the appearance that this choir has been around for years.

I think people are quite aware of what they are getting into when they sign up to the project. It is a bad mistake to underestimate peo-

**TK:** Your question leads me to one of my favorite topics: Does the artist exploit the participants? If the participants are not from the art world, it can be really difficult for them to really understand the context they enter. That’s why the artist has a big responsibility to ensure that the enthusiasm of the participants is not “used in a wrong way.”

It is impossible for anybody to take part in a Complaints Choir project without a warm self-irony. That makes the participants “well protected”—when you see them singing out their complaints with a smile on their face, you don’t laugh at the singers, you laugh with them.

Nothing is more beautiful than enthusiasm.

**GK:** Where has this intense and demanding art ride taken you? What’s next?

**OKK – TK:** The next work of ours is growing directly out of our experience with Complaints Choir. When we organized “Complaints Choir of Helsinki” the issue of work was brought up over and over again. The bad atmosphere in working places was a topic that seemed to strongly touch the hearts of Finnish complainers. So we thought that the topic of work deserves its own project. We’ll make that in Sweden in autumn 2007—thinking that Swedes might have a similar Protestant relationship to work like Finns do. We invite the workers and employees of Göteborg to direct short film scenes that tell what they really think about their job, about their boss and their co-workers. We give the opportunity to everybody to go completely ballistic and to bring their hidden office fantasies into reality — with the help of a film team and professional actors. All those ideas that have been brewing in the head during long dull working hours, all those monologues during sleepless nights directed at co-workers, all those imagined showdowns in the boss’s office — all are good material for these scenes. **BP**

# Nuevos Ricos: Performing the Crooked Copy

interview with Carlos Amoraes by Juan William Chávez



photo: courtesy of Nuevos Ricos

Nuevos Ricos band Silverio, live at Pornocha  
Mexico City, 2006

Carlos Amoraes (born in 1970) is a Mexican artist who works and lives in Mexico City. His most current work deals with images that come from what he calls his "liquid archive," comprised of an inventory of over 400 digital 'drawings' of appropriated images and intimate memories. Working with graphic designers, Amoraes produces vortex-based shapes of hairy humans walking on all fours, skull headed monkeys, gothic wolves, ravens and spider webs, just to list a few. These images take the form of digital drawings, animations, videos and installations.

In 2004, Amoraes along with composer Julian Lede and graphic designer André Pahl founded Nuevos Ricos, a record label project based in Mexico City. The label has a number of rock and electronic acts that have an outrageous performative stage presence. In addition to music, Nuevos Ricos is involved in other projects, some of which deal with histories and anthropological studies of gangs/punks in Mexico City. Through a combination of music, performance, graphic imagery and research, Nuevos Ricos has been redefining roles (of the artist, musician, music industry) and taking no prisoners.

The label represents the following artists: Titán, Silverio, Aux Raus, Dick el Demasiado, Felix Kubin, Faca, Lasser Moderna, Jessy Bulbo, Thom Revolver, Maria Daniela y su Sonido Lasser, Miki and 3rd Ear

[www.nuevosricos.com](http://www.nuevosricos.com)

The following interview was conducted via email.

**Juan William Chavez:** In everything you do, you seem to be working collaboratively and drawing on a collective audience or fan base — Lucha Libre performances, the *Devil's Dance*, or even working with designers on *Broken Animals*. Now with Nuevos Ricos you are continuing to draw on the collective fan

base by representing high-energy musicians, and opening the Nuevos Ricos material to piracy. One of your special projects even takes up research on the gangs of Mexico City in the eighties. What does the power of the collective mean to you, and what does it mean for your studio practice?

**Carlos Amoraes:** To me the possibility to work with others gives me the chance to allow substantial changes in my own ideas or in the products or thoughts that I provoke. I love that an idea is taken further by other people and changed or deformed into something else that I didn't expect to start with, so it transcends my sense of intellectual property and gives place to an exchange that goes in a circular way, as in the middle of the process I get feedback and then I throw the ball again. I believe that art and music are part of a larger collective culture, and as an individual I am interested in creating forms and shapes that can be interpreted by other people who have a different profession than mine, people who can see the same form from a different perspective. I see these forms as molds. Also I want these people I collaborate with to take the game very seriously and make it an integral part of their lives, so the relationship we establish is deeply rooted and the result implies a serious engagement that is experimental on an existential level.

Concerning my studio, I started it only two years ago after spending many years as an artist working on the road, something that I learned to hate. Then, I wanted to change my working dynamic so I could approach making art in a slower way, with more detail and effort and break out of the standards that are becoming usual to contemporary art. To accomplish this, I began to form a working team with young graphic designers because I thought I needed a very specific technical input in my work and at the same time I wanted to propose a learning experience, almost like a postgraduate study, which is something seriously lacking in Mexico

for visual artists and designers. After two years of experience I notice that the people working in my studio are beginning to appropriate the ideas and approach behind the working effort, so they are becoming less dependent and are taking their own decisions on what we do. I hope one day they will decide to leave the studio and go their own way, then I will have to rethink my own studio practice and my work will hopefully change again...

**JWC:** Give us some background. What came first, the artists or the label?

**CA:** The artists came first, at least in most cases. Artists like Titan, Silverio, Maria Daniela and Miki were part of the underground Mexico City movement in the mid nineties. They were people related to La Panaderia and the group of people who hang around there. Later these bands lost a lot of attention because their natural public grew older and more conservative and La Panaderia closed down. That was when Nuevos Ricos became important as a way to catch the attention of a new, younger, and wider audience, an audience that is less snobbish and more open to assimilate what we propose to them.

**JWC:** Let's talk about some of the artists on the label. What's the thread that ties all of the Nuevos Ricos musicians together? And also, where do you fit in as an artist?

**CA:** I think that what is important in most bands is a performance idea of presenting their live shows, where in the "serious musicians" sense the musical aspect goes to the background and a stage persona comes further, which is ironic. Nuevos Ricos doesn't look for a particular style of music but more for an attitude by the members of the bands, which mostly are people who have a hard time fitting into specific music or art contexts. There is a dysfunctional approach from the bands, where for instance Maria Daniela, their claim to Pop status is unconsciously jeopardized by their

own musical complexity. They try to make silly music that becomes too sophisticated for silly people. In the case of Silverio, he makes really danceable music while adopting a very decadent attitude that works like mirroring the decadent party attitude of the audience, and what is strange is that by doing so he becomes sexy and gets hardcore followers... And detractors.

As for me there are two levels where I interact with the project as an artist: The first and more evident is by doing and organizing the visual aspect of the project, either by drawing and designing myself with my team, or by inviting other artists to collaborate. In another level, more structural, I see Nuevos Ricos as a type of project that could fit into the notion of social sculpture, where the field of operations is the Mexican youth culture and the tool is the music label. It is in this last level where I am mostly interested in working because it involves thinking about how the social structure functions here.

I also see my participation as an artist as a continuation of previous projects, like the wrestling one, where my function and performance "persona" became similar to what a manager does. In that project, I wasn't really performing myself, but organizing actions with other performers, delegating the role to others. Now I work with rock bands with the idea to create new meanings and challenge the concepts established by the cultural and music industry.

Image is a big part of what the bands do, although still there is a big attention on the musical aspect because in the end music is more fluid in terms of reaching an audience. I think this is important in order to differentiate from the cool and arty karaoke attitude that has become very fashionable in recent years, where all is about mime and pose. Our music really goes to the radio stations and it doesn't end in cool arty parties, we bring it to a larger audience.

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**JWC:** So then, is Nuevos Ricos the orphanage for artists who have a hard time fitting in? Are you creating a new audience? And is that possible?

**CA:** What we have done is to brand this group of bands or performers into an umbrella concept – which is Nuevos Ricos – with the label but also with the texts we send to the media or the kind of presentations we do, or by refusing for instance to be branded by other brands of products (like sponsors, which have become a new sort of disease for Mexican culture). We had introduced ourselves as rebellious and at the same time as being extremely ironic and sometimes aggressive towards the mainstream Mexican culture, which today is something like a television product.

I think it is because of this attitude that a younger generation has identified with what we do, and also because we keep the message very open so they, the audience, can make of Nuevos Ricos what they want. At least we don't offer standard products like most rock and electronic bands or labels in our country. Young guys can find with us something closer to what it means to be part of a movement. We think that Nuevos Ricos also means a way to tell young people or colleagues that they can invent their own projects and be very ambitious, that they can realize them on their own and take power in simple ways. This maybe is not meaningful in other countries, but the Mexican society in general, is a very passive one: it is conformist.

We are not swimming in money but we have published products we are very proud of. Also now we are the owners of the company, so for that we had to invent it, to be the owners and not the employees in the music business.

**JWC:** You mentioned Silverio, with whom you worked for the Devil's Dance at the Berlin Biennial and later the Venice Biennial. Even though I wasn't there for the performance, when I read about it I was reminded of Maya

Deren's film, *The Divine Horsemen*. In her film, Gede the trickster was a cool guy, a spirit that was not really invited, but shows up during voodoo ceremonies and fucks with everyone a little a bit. In this scenario Silverio was the



Devil's Dance, at Galerie Micheline Szwajcer, Antwerp, 2000. Performance, wall and floor painting, Music.

electronic shaman with a sweet mustache that summoned this break dancing devil. Am I way off here?

**CA:** No, what you say makes sense and sounds sweet. Just that Silverio fucks a lot (with the audience).

**JWC:** It wasn't until I watched the videos online that I realized what sets Nuevos Ricos apart. Some of these videos are directed by other artists, while others are recordings of live performances. How much of this is about the experience of the music through video or performance as opposed to just the music itself?

**CA:** Yes, it is more about the image that is created, and I think this image has to do with a fantasy about what rock or pop can be. In our case, in Mexico during the eighties (when we

were teenagers) we were very marginalized from what was really going on musically and culturally outside the country, and we grew a big desire for that youth culture that became almost mythical. I think this was important

to our development as artists and musicians; it worked out in our imagination and now as adults is part of what we do, sometimes naively and sometimes more detached, with disenchantment or irony.

The latter is why it interested me to research about the eighties gangs in Mexico City, as these guys then experienced a similar thing when they discovered punk rock and saw *The Warriors* film. They projected their own desires into a form, appropriated it and changed it to fit their own reality. What I love about them and why I always was fascinated by them is that they were not real criminal gangs in the American sense, but their issues were more about having an identity and about being rebellious against an extremely oppressive social system that gave no space or interesting options to young people. This was in the eighties, but

today, concerning opportunities for young people, it is pretty much the same, but now Mexican youth has become very consumerist and instead of appropriating they customize...

**JWC:** Nuevos Ricos is very accepting of piracy, to the point where you actually involve it in some of your marketing. How does piracy empower the artists and what's your relationship to the music industry that frowns upon it?

**CA:** If you reach the pirate industry (or the pirate industry reaches you) it means that you are communicating with a real popular public, not with an elite. When we started to find bootleg copies of our recordings in the streets it was the first sign that we had succeeded in going beyond the art world and its bourgeois social circuit, so to say, that the project was reaching another broader social reality.

Also, in graphic terms, what became very exciting was to find new interpretations of what we were doing, like deformations. Do you remember the "Bizarro" world in Superman? This was a crooked version of Superman's ideal beautiful world (America), where instead of him there was a mean copy of himself. This is very much how the pirate industry is, a crooked copy that is the option to culture for those who cannot afford it. Mexico in many ways has become the crooked copy of the United States, and I don't mean this as a critique but as a compliment!

By making accessible our music and encouraging the pirates by adding and acknowledging their copies on our website or using their graphics for official copies, we have indirectly collaborated with pirate records producers. For the future, we are planning to further this form of collaboration in a way where we can buy their copies for a cheap production price and then export these to countries where CD piracy doesn't exist, as a cool object and as a graphic design concept. This we are thinking of as a strategic option to make a break from the current record business crisis, and not end up as an Internet music distributor, which is perhaps the most boring form of human existence. **BP**



## Three Questions on Art and Music with Los Super Elegantes

interview with Milena Muzquiz and Martiniano Lopez-Crozet by Juan William Chávez

Milena Muzquiz and Martiniano Lopez-Crozet (Born 1974 Tijuana, Mexico and 1966 Bahía Blanca, Argentina) are an internationally known artistic duo that forms Los Super Elegantes. Based in Los Angeles, Los Super Elegantes blur the role of the visual artist, musician and playwright. Known for their theatrical live performances and unique sound that has been characterized as punk-mariachi-hip-hop, Los Super Elegantes have been rocking out and exhibiting all over the world. In 2004, they were part of the Whitney Biennial in New York and the Frieze Art Fair in London and in 2006 at Vive Latino in Mexico City and at Art Basel in Miami Beach. Los Super Elegantes have played with Beck, done a version of Nirvana's "Rape Me" in French, and have DJ'ed throughout Europe and North and South America.

Los Super Elegantes took some time from the recording studio where they are currently working on their new album to answer three questions on music and art. This interview was conducted via e-mail.

**Juan William Chavez:** There's always been a crossover between musicians and artists. For example, Miles Davis wanted to be a painter, Allen Ginsberg wanted to be a singer,



Los Super Elegantes, "Nothing Really Matters" music video, 2006

while bands like the Talking Heads and Devo started in art school. Most of the time, these musicians don't successfully combine their music with their studio art practice. How does

Los Super Elegantes make the crossover? Can you have your cake and eat it too?

**Milena Muzquiz:** Who cares?

**Martiniano Lopez-Crozet:** There's a short essay by Deleuze called *How Philosophy is Useful to Mathematicians or Musicians*. In it he talks about how the possession of knowledge of philosophy by a musician may not be as important as the immediate concerns these musicians already have and how these musicians look outside of music for something they can use themselves. When we started the band in 1995, we were inspired by the underground scene of the early 80's in Madrid. The early Almodovar movies were crucial for us because they showed how the housewife or grandma as doing the same amount of drugs and needed to escape the same totalitarianism as the new wave/punks. So in *Labyrinth of Passion* the singer of a band breaks his leg and is replaced — by accident — by a Shiite terrorist escaping the police. The band becomes huge. These types of accidents are important. We wrote our first song "Panadero" before starting the band — by accident — while we were art students. Our practice has been experimental from the start and is the consequence of putting two minds in one room. Now if we start judging how good or bad was Allen Ginsberg's singing... How successful was Miles Davis as a painter? I personally don't care as we have stopped caring to judge our own work as

good, bad, acceptable, etc. We managed to incorporate accidents, inclinations, nostalgia for something that didn't happen and our desire to create a scene into a formal practice that involves writing, music, plays, making videos and collaborating with other artists.

**JWC:** I recently saw one of your dance paintings at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. I wasn't there for the performance, but seeing the painting led me to the YouTube video of a similar performance at Blow de la Barra in London. I like the idea that the lyrics and the music dictate the dance steps, which becomes a method of composition for the painting. You're not just cutting a rug with paint on your feet, but what does painting add to this already well-rounded performative practice?

**MLC:** We were influenced by our last play *The vocabulary of an Interior Decorator*. In the play an interior decorator named Mimi Patino destroys Ferruccio Wolff's house as a result of using her conceptual methods: Decorating with Dogs, Furniture on Wheels, basically using man-made debris to achieve her masterpiece. What determines the value of an object? What makes it worth what it's worth? In the end Ferruccio suffers a heart attack when Mimi hands him the bill.

**MM:** It is a recording of a song; it is a solution to keep a moment alive and defined.



Los Super Elegantes, "Dance Painting" Performance, 2005

Although it is formal once it is hung on a wall, it happens to have unheard sound in its composition. It is an open door to an unmet moment or a memory.

**JWC:** You've also used dance in other projects such as the Slow Dance Club. I think certain artists have been trying to incorporate dance — from Wolfgang Tillmans to Tunga, or

Carlos Amorales. What makes dance powerful is collective effervescence, the idea that at one moment everyone is thinking and doing the same thing. Dancing is a positive example of this, when the group becomes one. Does this factor into your use of dance and performance?

**MLC:** No. Dance in our performances is more personal than collective. It's just moving to the music we've composed and performed and since there are two of us it's always natural to coordinate a few steps. In the case of the Slow Dance Club, the idea came as a way of seducing people. Both Milena and I grew up with this practice. When I was twelve it was very trendy — parents were forced by teens to throw these types of parties. Kids start exploring sexuality in a socialized and formal way, so we felt the urge to go back to that idea—civilized rubbing with a stranger. This piece was commissioned by the Frieze Art Fair in London, so we thought it was a good place for dealers to celebrate business, to negotiate over cocktails...

**MM:** The idea of a group of people becoming one physical entity is everything. This happens on a stage when the light is projected into your eyes, you are blind, and you end up looking at your creation, which is movement and dance. It is the moment of rhythm that connects all your circumstances. This is music, it is beautiful. **BP**

## Moving the Image: The Cinema Economy in Art

by Tim Ridlen

It is taken for granted that film and video hold a firm ground in contemporary art spaces. No one blinks when they see a projector pointed at a wall in an otherwise empty gallery. Despite the relevant history of film and video in the gallery, its current place there is somewhat gratuitous. Furthermore, the idea of a technology-based art form that exists more as an experience than an object requires an artist to take a stand on the system of viewing, collecting, and preserving their work. This is what I would like to call the **economy** of the artwork, and it relies more on the "cognitive transaction" than the money exchanged for the product.<sup>1</sup> As a young video maker myself, there is a challenge in getting someone to collect something that doesn't physically exist. Of course, this isn't a challenge that hasn't been met before by the innovative dealer. Anything can sell in a gallery, as time has shown. The question to the young artist is about compatibility. There are real lessons to be learned from the history of cinema in the gallery: how it came to be there and what it means to be there now. There are a few different models of the cinema experience and economy—some in complete opposition to one another—that have come to exist in the contemporary space of art. They overlap, they draw on one another, they challenge each other, but alas they coexist. The question, then, is what does each of these models offer in the way artists approach the cinema? By understanding cinema as any medium that employs the moving image, inherently a durational experience, I would like to explore the inherent contradictions of the cinema **economy**, in my appropriated sense the word.

John G. Hanhardt suggests the essence of the moving image is the "cognitive transaction between the viewer and the projected film image."<sup>2</sup> This transaction naturally requires a system and a context in which to take place, which begins with the very necessities from which the medium was born: the acetate film, the projector, and even the simple necessity to turn the lights out. From extrinsic conventions or innovations placed on the cinema experience this system solidifies and starts to become part of a work's meaning. Simply put, a film in a theater is seen differently than in a gallery. But what is more, the system of production, distribution, and exhibition—the traditional understanding of the economy around a work of art—affects that cognitive transaction enormously. My use of the word **economy** to describe the system that adds meaning to a cognitive transaction with a work of art is less a redefining and more an extension of the system that already operates around the production, distribution, exhibition, and preservation of a work of art. So let me start by describing a bit of that system.

The film industry and the major studios are responsible for the most forceful model of distributing and viewing films: the public theater. Besides hashing out the cinematic conventions in the years before the polarization of commercial and artistic cinema, Hollywood was responsible for the proliferation of theaters across America. This development goes back to the days when major Hollywood studios were vertically integrated, owning the means of production, distribution, and everything in between. Hollywood, however, can be considered part of a popular culture that offers nothing to artists directly, only through an indirect and sometimes volatile exchange in both directions. Independent and world cinemas have dutifully stood as the alternative. Their existence, however, is predicated on the distribution model set up by the industry, and the artistic model solidified in narrative structure. That is to say, the world of European art films or indepen-

dent cinema at large is not free from the problems of distribution, despite their ability to make "better" films. As it is in the present day, their adherence to the known model of theatrical release followed by individual consumption is only the alternative that allows for the proliferation of the status quo. The flow from one hierarchical position to another can be seen easily enough at the gates of Sundance, or the studios of Warner Independent. In other words, as they exist now, they are not much more than a minor league to Hollywood's majors.

Early in the days of the industry, there was an attempt to recognize the cultural (i.e. non-commercial) value of the film art. To serve that growing sentiment, the Museum of Modern Art took up the challenge of preservation and distribution of artistically meritorious films in their Film Library. MoMA's Film Library served the film societies and academic institutions interested in film as an art form beginning in the 1930s. For the first time, a film could be requested for screening outside of any commercial interest. MoMA's Film Library was really the beginning of any cultural alternative to film as an industry in the United States. Figures like Frank Stauffacher, Amos Vogel, and Jonas Mekas benefited from the collection at MoMA and went on to be considered key instigators in the blossoming of a film avant-garde.<sup>3</sup> MoMA's Film Library is not typically what one thinks of when referring to film and video in the museum today, but as a reminder, projected installation is not the **only** way for a museum to be the harbinger and protector of moving image work.

It was MoMA's collection that helped to establish a second distribution model of the moving image. Artistically, avant-garde filmmakers broke early on with narrative cinema, but remained true to the established way of viewing film. Their model, adopted from MoMA's method of distribution, was still built on an expectation around spectatorship. Filmmakers of this avant-garde persuasion went soft when cooed by the sound of the projector or the flicker of each individual frame. More importantly, they were devoted to the "traditional theatre situation. Audience here, screen there."<sup>4</sup> However, beginning with the Filmmaker's Cooperative set up by Jonas Mekas and others in 1961, the avant-garde had begun to seriously consider alternatives to the big distributors. The Filmmaker's Cooperative had a policy of open submission, by which any filmmaker could submit a film to be catalogued and rented out to a venue for screening. This fee went in part to the Co-op and the rest to the artist. Whoever rented the film could in turn charge a membership or admission fee to cover the costs. This was not a unique model, but the Filmmaker's Cooperative was its largest proponent. On the West Coast, Canyon Cinema developed a similar catalogue of films, and this model of distribution was procured. Later, this model would be adopted by the world of video and media artists at large, albeit not as an open forum, but rather with a selective body. This model could also be connected historically with the rise of a Microcinema culture in the 90s, a large subculture that prefers the touring circuit and screening event to the art world.

I would like to enumerate the various economic implications up until this point. First, the model established by MoMA and the Filmmaker's Cooperative takes as a given the understanding that a film can be made into an unlimited number of editions. This given is only increasing in the present with digital video, which suffers no generational loss when copied. Functionally, the film is treated as intellectual property outright. There is no illusion about the possibility of creating multiple cop-

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ies; rather, the exhibitor or collector is purchasing the rights regarding the exhibition, duplication, and preservation of the work. Second, this is the understanding of film that has traditionally been adopted, and represents no break with the given model established in the early days of cinema. Experiencing a work from beginning to end triumphs over the possibility of an expanded spatial dimension of cinema. Third, the avant-garde of this time presents itself as a quantitative but not qualitative difference in producing and experiencing cinema. Unfortunately, however, there is no such thing as a quantitative difference that does not have some qualitative effect in a medium that requires so many financial resources to produce and distribute en masse. While this shouldn't be a problem—and it wasn't particularly for the avant-garde that emphasized the process of individual and low budget production—it leaves contemporary artist-filmmakers in the dust when scrounging for funds to use large crews and decent equipment.

The Electronic Arts Intermix, founded by Howard Wise, was one of the first to distribute video in a way similar to the Filmmaker's Cooperative and began as a foundation for funding media projects in 1971. Howard Wise himself figured prominently in the third distribution model of the moving image, however, before he went on to found EAI. The Howard Wise Gallery in 1969 was the venue for the seminal video art exhibition *TV as a Creative Medium*, defined as the first exhibition that brought to fruition the latent video art underground.<sup>5</sup> Howard Wise was a benevolent force in the world of media art. He and others, like Leo Castelli, were the early examples of how film and video could coexist with the gallery system through funding artists on specific projects. In addition, avant-garde filmmakers, performance artists, and conceptual artists started to consider film in the gallery exhibition context. The moving image confined to a specific installation format gives up a certain amount of temporal control for the possibility of a spatial experience. Seminal works that moved into the gallery include Michael Snow's *Two Sides to Every Story* for the exhibition *Projected Images* at the Walker Art Center, and several works in the largely Conceptual Art exhibition *Information* at MoMA in 1970. Together, these exhibitions represent the convergence of two trajectories, one breaking out of the gallery for a challenging redefinition of the art object, the other expanding the cinema to explore a new experience of the moving image that broke from the theater.

After this time, the cinema experience had established itself on any place in the continuum. The only innovations in the way we experience the moving image since this time have been an extension of the populist medium of broadcast television.<sup>6</sup> The way film/video has been distributed and hence exhibited has been internalized into codes of cultural experience that add meaning to a work. Presently, every way in which one could experience a moving image has been codified into a set of characteristics: If projected in a dark black room with carpet, the connotation is a theater-like experience. Likewise, a multi-screen projection that can be circumnavigated instantly becomes installation, harking back to the first days of the projected image in the gallery. Even the use of an outmoded technology, such as a 16mm projector openly running against a blank wall, makes reference to the early film avant-garde or nostalgia about the medium. The claim that it is all installation, and more importantly that it is all a sellable object or edition, is an effort to force the cinema experience into the art world economy. What was once artistic innovation and boundary crossing is now a safe and well-understood language of art experience.

There are certainly different and well-merited reasons for taking the moving image into the gallery exhibition space. The possibility of watching a loop over and over again, for example, or only staying for a very short time allows for different experiences of a work. It also gives control back to the viewer as a free agent in his or her own experience with a work.<sup>7</sup> How this work enters or leaves the space of that experience complicates the matter. The preferred convention of editioning works—with the precedent set by photography, but also employed in the ready-mades of Marcel DuChamp—means the work exists as part of a collection, museum or otherwise. As others have pointed out, in many cases the idea of the limited edition is merely an artificial structure to control the price of a work.<sup>8</sup> In a very literal sense, there is no reason that a film or video work—particularly digital media—could not be reproduced ad infinitum. In fact, unhindered reproduction actually presents itself as a very real method for preservation.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, this means constantly transferring works as technology changes. In addition, however, if the works were allowed to flow freely within the increasingly participatory culture of technology, they would take on a life of their own with increased chances of survival. While this method offers potential solutions to preservation and treats the medium as it is, it has so far failed to meet the criteria of artists either interested in spatial control or the intellectual property rights of their work.

If the structures that exist around the production, distribution, exhibition, and preservation of a work have crept into the language with which a work can make meaning, this is by no means a problem. My broach of the topic here is really an attempt to map these great advantages, possibilities, and artistic freedoms with the economic (traditionally economic) system in play because in reality it is that system that has come out on top. The economy of the artwork should dictate the economic structures around collecting and preserving the work, when quite often this is not the case. **BP**

<sup>1</sup> John G. Hanhardt, "The Media Arts and the Museum: Reflections on a History, 1963-1973, *Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th Century Art*, Ed. Miguel Angel Corzo, (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999) 96.  
<sup>2</sup> Hanhardt, 96.  
<sup>3</sup> Scott MacDonald, *Art in Cinema: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society*, (Philadelphia: Temple Univ., 2006) 2.  
<sup>4</sup> "Michael Snow on La Région Centrale (transcribed and edited from a conversation with Charlotte Townsend, Halifax, December 1970), *Film Culture* 52 (Spring 1971): 62-63.  
<sup>5</sup> Marita Sturken, "TV as a Creative Medium: Howard Wise and Video Art," *Afterimage*, 11-10, May 1984, 5-8.  
<sup>6</sup> Examples range from cable and satellite television to digital television recorders and, of course, the Internet with its scores of streaming video websites.  
<sup>7</sup> This was mentioned by Malcolm Turvey in a discussion for "Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art," *October*, (Cambridge, Mass.) 104, Spring 2003, 71-96.  
<sup>8</sup> This idea was mentioned by Anthony McCall in "Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art," *October*, (Cambridge, Mass.) 104, Spring 2003, 71-96.  
<sup>9</sup> Bill Viola, "Permanent Impermanence, *Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th Century Art*, Ed. Miguel Angel Corzo, (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999) 85-95.

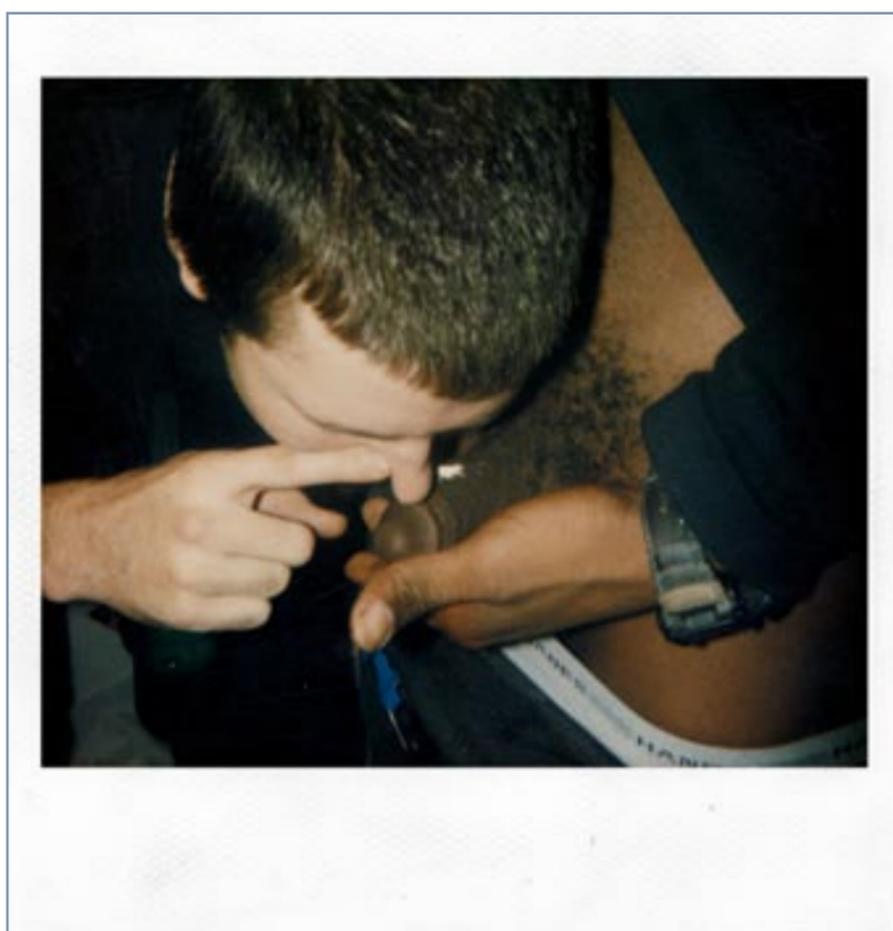
## Art and Entertainment

by Wyatt Arden Kahn

What is art? Mark Twain said, "Art is anything that is useless." I have always been confused by Twain's definition in comparison to Walter Benjamin's dialogue about storytellers, "All this (the storyteller) points to the nature of every real story. It contains, openly or covertly, something useful."<sup>1</sup>

Benjamin explores the very specific example of the loss of the storyteller in early 20th century culture, leading to a questioning of the nature of the storyteller as an art itself. In Benjamin's assessment, the storyteller represents the loss of a greater category within Benjamin's writing, that of experience: "Today, if having council is beginning to have an old fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is dying."<sup>2</sup> To Benjamin, experience was the interaction with others. It was not simply "living one's life" but it was internalizing one's experience with others' experiences, the sharing of those experiences, experiences that are in direct relation to capital. Benjamin aligns the destruction of the storyteller with the rise of the modern novel.

The novel was the most apparent form of literacy that does not come from any form of auditory tradition, "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listen-



Dash Snow, *Polaroid (No.6)*, 2005  
 Color Polaroid, 4" x 4.25" Courtesy of Rivington Arms

ing to his tale."<sup>3</sup> The isolated novelist transitioned out of the storyteller in the beginning of Modernism, "The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others."<sup>4</sup> The novelist is no longer aware of larger cultural concerns because they have made a choice to isolate themselves, knowing only their own concerns. This choice resulted in the creation of the form of art of the system, art that is useless. The consequence of this choice was the destruction of the form of art that represented the collective consciousness, art that is useful.

The transition from the storyteller to novelist was an economic transition. With the development of capitalism, in particular that of the printing press, the novelist became an economic opportunity that the storyteller was not. In this transition artists accepted and forever will accept the commodification of their work. The artist is not the only profession that came from the storyteller, the entertainer also developed as a commodity form of the storyteller. In essence the storyteller's function split in two; the creator in the storyteller — the artist — transformed into the novelist, and the speaker within the storyteller — the presenter of stories — transformed into the entertainer. The novelist accepted to have his

or her art commodified, while the entertainer accepted to have him or herself commodified. The entertainer cherishes the restriction of the medium, while the artist strives in the freedom of his or hers.

A danger in the freedom of the artist is the creation of artists such as Dash Snow, who recently appeared on the cover of *New York* magazine, along with Ryan McGinley and Dan Colen. What Snow represents is an aestheticization of the artist that supersedes the aestheticization of the artwork, or in other words the transformation of visual arts into entertainment. The *New York* magazine cover states that "These are Warhol's Children," however neither Warhol nor Basquiat (who would be Warhol's child if there was one) were artists who held their personal aesthetics and image over their art. Basquiat produced art that was commodified not because of who he was but because of the originality of his work. This originality coupled with his eccentric personality justified the choice of him as the artistic icon of the 80s, just as Warhol was justified in holding that role in 70s and Pollock in the 50s. These were larger than life artistic figures, but these public personas were formed after the initial success of their artwork. This is in deep contrast to Snow whose image was produced before the success of his artwork. This is a significant development because it suggests that the aesthetic attraction to Dash Snow's art does not lie solely in the image but in his image as well. Take for example his most recent project, *Nest*, a collaboration with Colen at Deitch Projects, where the artists filled the gallery with torn up newspaper and created one of their characteristic "hamster nests," mimicking an activity that the two originated in hotel rooms. Snow's "nests" do use his lifestyle to further his art but rather the art furthers the myth and reputation of his lifestyle.

Image has always been a tool for marketing, especially in the arts, but the power of art always lies in the work. The power of Snow's art does not lie in the work but in the life. And unlike Nan Goldin, Peter Hujar and Wolfgang Tillmans, all of whose work has similarities and were likely inspiration for Snow, there is a false celebration of the life in Snow's work. With Goldin, Hujar and Tillmans, the work exposes their lives while allowing the viewer to decide if these lives are to be enjoyed or pitied. It is the honesty of their work that creates the wonderful ambiguity of feelings that is lacking in Snow's work, mostly because before the creation of his art he created his life. This has worked as a marketing tool to ignite his art career, which only furthers his persona.

What is crucial is that Snow's rise to prominence is more similar to that of an entertainer than an artist. In Snow's case, Snow himself is the commodity and his artwork is the currency of his commodity. The art world accepted the artwork as a commodity form, but it was the entertainment world that accepted the entertainer as the commodity form (e.g. the actor is far more recognizable than the director). In the entertainment world, popular music, is repressed by its medium. Music is limited to a four-minute song structure based on early 20th century technology (the phonograph) with a basic four/four rhythm that is familiar and therefore accessible as entertainment. As Theodor Adorno pointed out, "Listeners and products fit together; they are not even offered the structure which they cannot follow...the forms of hit songs are so strictly standardized, down to the number of beats and the exact duration, that no specific form appears in place."<sup>5</sup> Initially this was seen as making music more free because it took music out of the concert hall and into the homes, but it resulted in a more commodified, restricted medium, one that is equally dependent on, and therefore conforms to technology and familiarity.

In contrast, art since Duchamp's *Fountain*, has become more and more free. This freedom was an effort by the artists to push the commodity form to its limits. By doing this the artist kept the division between themselves and the commodity form active. This division allowed the artist to challenge capitalism. The artist did this by forcing a market to commodify and therefore accept objects (such as the urinal in *Fountain*) that were more and more dependent on their abandoned utility. This challenge to capitalism possessed a rare moment between the creation of the object and the commodification of the object by capitalism. In this moment the artist becomes a cultural producer because the artist reveals society's inane desire for the object form. This is the only active critique the artist could make.

What is worrisome about Snow is that he has abused the liberal nature of visual arts and made it restrictive, similar to music. He does this because he does not desire to keep the distinction between the artist and entertainer active. He is commodified like the entertainer but engages in what keeps art from entertainment: art itself. This engagement in art devalues the commodity form of art and increases the commodity form of the artist in its place. Snow has opened the



Dash Snow, *Polaroid (No.3)*, 2005  
Color Polaroid, 4" x 4.25" Courtesy of Rivington Arms

door for the artist to no longer force art to act as a commodity, resulting in art as entertainment. This results in art that most directly relates back to the persona of the artist, therefore keeping the artist as the commodity form and keeping art as a form of entertainment. This eliminates the possibility of the artist as an active cultural producer and leaves the artist as nothing more than a creative worker.

As 20<sup>th</sup> century art became broader it often became more difficult to decipher what artists intended to be their commodity. Artists using performance, such as Chris Burden, Orlan and Joseph Beuys, called into question a lack of any necessary difference between the commodity of the physical artwork and the commodity of the artist themselves. These artists were not suggesting that they were entertainers in commodifying themselves, but rather they still relied on the commodified object as a referent to point out that the modern human experience is one of the commodity form. These artists found a way to make a commodified art object out of a performative act.

There exists a fine line between the aestheticization of daily life and the use of one's daily life as performative artwork. Intentionality is crucial to make this distinction. Joseph Beuys's work shifted in and out of his daily life, which further developed the character that tied together all of Beuys's work. Beuys does not display traits of the entertainer because

Beuys's self-aestheticization was part of the story that tied together his two and three dimensional work with his performative work. In *Life Course/Work Course* Beuys actually makes his fictionalized autobiography a work of art by editing the end of the document, "a demonstration of his aestheticisation of the self, accomplished by turning his life into an allegory for his production of art."<sup>6</sup> In some ways Beuys enacts the idea of a storyteller, however this is more in reference to the wandering Tartar tribesmen who saved his life (the fictional tribesmen resemble the pre-modern storyteller in their nomadic existence). Beuys's reenacting of the storyteller by his development into a sort of transcontinental modern storyteller was itself useful in completing the conceptual idea that he was saved by the pre-modern storyteller in his autobiography. Beuys's story was developed to further a commodity and to give meaning to the materiality and iconography that is so present in his work, without which would appear to be random or absurd. He establishes this connection by editing his story as a false autobiography. He used the story to make his art objects more easily understood and therefore more commodifiable. Beuys has not only pushed the commodity form of art, but also expanded the use of performance not to further a career but to further the conceptual coherence of a body of work.

Dash Snow's self-aestheticization is not utilized as a tool to tie together his artwork but his artwork is a tool to tie together his persona. To many viewers, Snow's work represents the breaking of new ground in bringing together art and entertainment that is reminiscent of what the storyteller originally represented. However, there can be no reunification between the artist and the entertainer, "The unity of the two spheres of music is thus that of an unresolved contradiction. They do not hang together in such a way that the lower (entertainment) could serve as a sort of popular introduction to the higher (art), or that the higher could renew its lost collective strength by borrowing from the lower...there is no third way; the situation has polarized itself into extremes which actually meet. There is no room between them for the 'individual.'"<sup>7</sup> In this reflection on art and entertainment, centered around music, Adorno debunks any attempt to classify hyped persona and artwork as a reunification of art and entertainment. The storyteller is an agent of the past and any attempt to reincarnate him remains a reaction to the shortcomings of the present. What is at stake now is the responsibility we have to the present and possibilities for the future. The initiated conformity that will result in the loss of one of the only active critiques available in contemporary culture can be halted but not reversed. If not, rather than try to answer what is art; it may be more pertinent to ask: What is not entertainment?

<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov" *Illuminations*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 86.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin 86.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin 86.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin 87.

<sup>5</sup> Theodor Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" *The Culture Industry*. (New York: Routledge Classics, 1991) 49.

<sup>6</sup> Pamela Jort, "Joseph Beuys' Aesthetic 1958-1972, *Joseph Beuys: Diverging Critiques* (Tate Gallery Liverpool Critical Forum Series, Vol. 2, 1995) 65.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," *The Culture Industry* (New York: Routledge Classics, 1991) 34-35.

# The Nth Dimension

by Juozas Cernius

*"It is true, that which I have revealed to you; there is no god, no universe, no human race, no earthly life, no heaven, no hell. It is all a dream – a grotesque and foolish dream. Nothing exists but you. And you are but a thought – a vagrant thought, a useless thought, a homeless thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities!"*

– Mark Twain, *The Mysterious Stranger*

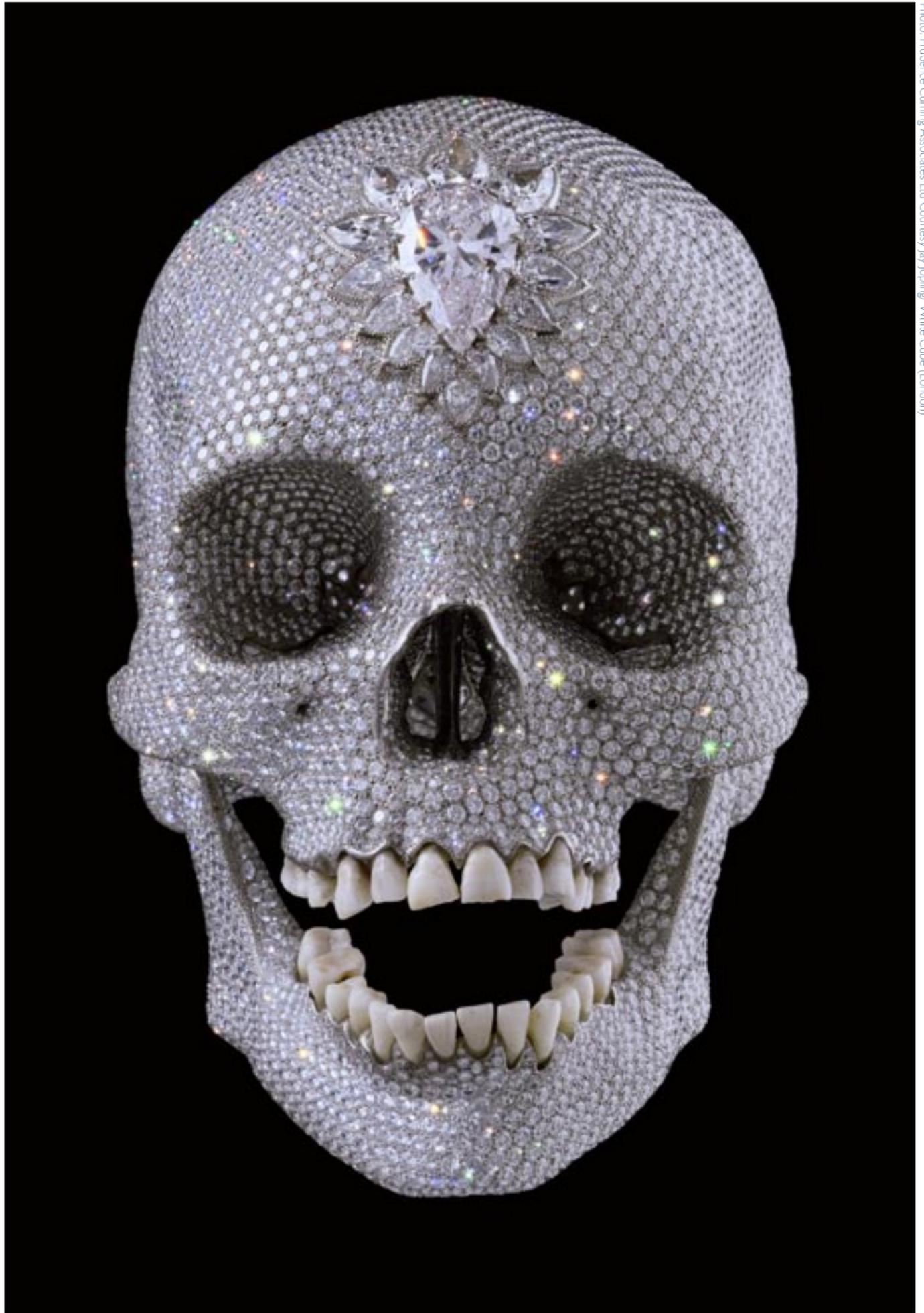
"Besides, it's always someone else who dies," reads the epitaph of Marcel Duchamp. As tongue-in-cheek as that final statement was, you can see it pretty easily these days: did you watch Saddam Hussein at the rope on YouTube? The trivial and profound have become indistinguishable while death and anguish become forms of entertainment. The power of such entertainment is not to be underestimated, as the death spectacle is leveraged for the recruit of acolytes to various religious and political organizations. The irreverent execution of Saddam Hussein forced the situation to full circle, in its abject and pathetic morbidity, to Hussein's own previous rhetoric of "god is great," penned by himself on the national Iraqi flag in 1991, and, "May god bless the souls of our honorable martyrs," a statement made to dignify the beginning of many future Iraqi sufferings and sacrifices in the face of military invasion. Saddam personified that martyrdom in his final chaotic moments, and his death further depleted chances for reconciliation in Iraq while other leaders continued to co-opt that god-justified posturing for their own advantage.

This really does have something to do with art. After all, if art has relevance to anything, it has relevance to everything. Even though art can be so elusive to any particular set of responsibilities that artists frequently bask in the solipsism that precludes their involvement in most major world actions, those in their professions still manage to get work done in significant and inventive ways. By virtue of such merits and the surrounding culture and society, art becomes aligned to political stances not dissimilar to those between the major religious/cultural adversaries around the world today.

One side of a great contemporary conflict is the religious fanatic, the whiplash of communities brought together by common plight and/or interpretation of religious texts. Osama bin Laden's continuously, if sporadically, menacing campaign of retribution credits god as his underwriter: "...our guardian and helper, while you have no guardian or helper." His turgid resolve shows a distinct similarity to the evangelism of members of the Rev. Fred Phelps' Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, who have picketed military funerals with placards stating "thank god for IED's" as a response to America's lax treatment of homosexuals. All sides of a religious argument take shelter in what their god offers, as understood by Sigmund Freud:

*"The gods retain their threefold task: they must exorcise the terrors of nature, they must reconcile men to the cruelty of Fate, particularly as it is shown in death, and they must compensate them for the sufferings and privations which a civilized life in common has imposed on them."*

Freud saw religion, in part, as an administrative or governing structure necessary to the formation of viable communities at a time, during the infancy of science, when no rational explanation could be satisfactory. In such an arrangement, one is compensated for restricting one's animal urges (primarily, but not exclusively, to murder) in favor of the benefits and relative safety in community against earthly elements. Along the way, the rules moved from compelling individuals in society to act for a mutual benefit to a set of edicts under which to live, with the looming fear of eternal punishment and the dubious addition that the rules are



Damien Hirst, *For the Love of God*, 2007  
Platinum, diamonds and human teeth

impossible to obey. Religions thusly developed a guilty lot of credulous sinners, implementing their followers as soldiers to divinely justified acts, like the plethora of suicide bombers who eagerly set forth to claim their otherworldly fortunes.

Successful opposition to this wrangling fundamentalism is creative culture, where ideas are born of productivity and things get built for more people with other ideas, where the trajectory of possibility is always upwards. This place can be anywhere, and it should be everywhere, but it is not. The growing pains of society often come in the form of offended individuals, as a slave owner might be offended by the idea of emancipation. Such offensive behavior is the hallmark of progressive creativity. Its fearlessness points like a dowser's wand, with hope, to the future.

Many artists navigate their practices through the GPS-like elements of protest, social commentary and personal conviction. Robert

Gober might do it in one of the strongest body of works of any living artist, but Damien Hirst offers a particular belching in the face of politeness in his most recent foray, the already infamous *For the Love of God*, a platinum cast human skull (with real teeth) thoroughly covered in diamonds. In *For the Love of God*, the physical vacancy of the fleshy things we relate to and the generally cartoonish look skulls have leave a distinct feeling that it is "always someone else who dies." However, skulls don't need to work too hard to get our imaginations rolling, we see ourselves in the details. Skeletal eye sockets have nearly an endearing and sympathetic look, but their emptiness belies their emotional beseeching. The dentition is the only part of the skeleton seen in life, and so the wide rack of teeth disturbingly resembles hideously chattering laughter. The next question might be "laughing at what" or "laughing from where?" Don't expect an answer. And how about all those diamonds, those tremendously abundant yet pricey stones? The saying goes: "a diamond is forever," but Hirst reworks the

idea, conflating very earthly and human inventions of wealth, taste and permanence with the eventuality of all flesh. This is a confrontation of death, with an enormous diamond placed with phrenological interest, or like a bindi decoration, on the forehead.

As ostentatious as it may seem in its 99 million dollar glitter, *For the Love of God* makes use of the Christian vernacular, its common blasphemies and tropes of death and judgment, transformed into a kind of poetic Christian felony. It's a stark refute to the macabre monopoly religions try to hold on death and its mysteries. Hirst sublimates the idea, purging any possibility of glibness through the use of the precious metal and gemstones, chiming together in a great artistic and financial gamble. Death, expertly pitted against life, art, and career, shows up embodied in the bejeweled, paraded and displayed object for sale. **BP**

Photo: Prudence Cunning Associates Ltd Courtesy Jay Jopling/White Cube (London)

# Rhythm and Symbol

by Serkan Özkaya

Afsar Timucin was my professor at Istanbul University when I was pursuing my master's degree in German Studies, and he really gave me a very clear understanding of many classical philosophers, roughly put, from Aristotle to Hegel. In Turkey, Timucin is not only famous for the explanatory large volumes of history of philosophy he has written or his numerous books on aesthetics but also for his rather sentimental poems. It's always surprising to read his poetry when his systematic way of thinking about philosophy or art comes to mind, but I guess this is a common dichotomy of the intelligentsia in Turkey. The marxists are a little less materialist here and the poets a little more political. Timucin resembles an extraordinarily good outcome of this way of being. As one could imagine, emotional leftist intellectuals tend to be fanatical most of the time, as the right wing already is, and the whole arena is filled with an atmosphere of a soccer game with the slogan: "This game is not a matter of life and death, it's much more than that!"

When I looked at the passages I had chosen in Timucin's *Estetik*, I thought the ideas were passé and way too modernist. Then I realized, this was particularly the way of thinking and looking at the world which inspired me in regard to my working and thinking process. The more abstract the structure got the more concrete my concepts became. He looks into the world of ideas like many of his philosopher colleagues and not necessarily into the world of things – including works of art. He asks philosophical questions and extends his answers to generalizations. This detachment gave me an impulse to bring the discourse back to the worldly world, the world of things – including works of art. I believe in the arts every work is a case of itself and for itself.

## RHYTHM AND SYMBOL

Afsar Timucin. "Estetik"  
(Translation is by Mehtap Ozturk)  
Insancil Publishing House. Third Edition.  
1998. pp. 164 - 168

Concepts of 'time' and 'space' bring us to the two most fundamental issues of aesthetics; 'rhythm' and 'sign.'

There is neither perception of the time without the space nor perception of the space without the time. Consciousness does not display any activity outside of the inner-perception or outer-perception, and it cannot be separated from this double-totality. In other words; while consciousness is gazing at both itself and the external world, of which it is a part, perceives everything within the totality of space-time.

The ego perceives itself as time, and at this very moment of perception it reaches space. Space appears in time or time surrounds space. In this context, rhythm becomes a precondition in art; it becomes a determining precondition.

Rhythm is a product of time and a product of the sensation of time, whereas symbol is not a direct product of time. Rhythm is time that is composed with consciousness. The symbol contains many other components besides time.

While rhythm opens us up from time to the space, the symbol comes into being in the totality of space and time. Rhythm is a sense, an intuition; and the symbol is a reality, it is there, it exists as a concrete component of a work of art.

Rhythm is the primary component; it surrounds both the symbol and other components.

A work of art first and foremost attracts our attention by its rhythmic structure; the emotion of the work of art finds its expression firstly in the rhythm. In a work of art, the emotion cannot be contrary to the conception nor can the rhythm be alien or remote to this very emotion of the artwork.

We, who are dynamic in the world, are also rhythmic. This rhythmic web conveys various totalities of meaning, which are shaped in particular ways, each one of the totalities of meaning is artificial and with respect to itself. These totalities of meaning or units of symbolic meaning are seen as specially determining or they operate in this way. In a work of art, each paradigm, which reaches a particular competence of expression, is a symbol.

The symbol is always rhythmic, it is tailored from the fabric of time, it is always a special language,



"To my brother Serkan with my best wishes, April the 14th, 1998 A. Timucin"

and it displays strength of a particular narrative. The rhythm appears to us through the perception of dynamics in the world and in us via our bodies and psyches. In rhythm, the sensorial element is determining; this sensorial element immediately reunites with the emotional element. The rhythm first of all declares a certain sentimentality it is responsible for the explanation of sentimentality. Yet, all the burden of explanation in a work of art appears to be on the rhythm's shoulders. Lalo, rightly, says: 'The rhythm is a perception that is totally rooted in muscle.'

No art displays things directly: By going through the rhythmic-symbolic structure, we are able to reach the essence of reality or we are able to enter the meaning of the work of art. The rhythm and the symbol, which exist in the preconditions of space and time, are two elements that render a work of art in a meaningful or expressive way.

We can name the two (*the rhythm and the symbol*) as an outcome or a composition of the ego, which is constructed specially or under special conditions, in an external world, which is again thought specially or under special conditions. In both of them the reality is transformed in a way in which to provide a particular expression. To describe the ego and the world or to describe the totality of the ego-world, in other words to describe the ego in the world or the world in the ego, is possible by bringing these concepts to rhythmic and symbolic forms, to authentic forms. This transformation serves first of all to create a language; it is the creation of the artist's own language and possibilities of expression. In this transformation, the complex ego and the complex world enter into a plainly expressive situation within a frame of a specific idea. According to this, the highest level of expressive eventuates in art and the symbol provides the highest expression under the determination of the rhythm.

The symbol is a condition of artistic expression and the rhythm is a condition of human life. According to Bergson: "The reason why musical sounds have a stronger effect on us than the natural sounds, derives from this: while nature is limited in explaining emotions, music is capable of explaining these emotions to us. Where does the attraction of a poem come from? The poet is such a person that in him emotions transform to images and images transform into words, which are appropriate for rhythm and are able to stand for themselves. By seeing these images passing in front of our eyes, we feel the emotions, which can be called the emotional equivalent of them. However, these images cannot eventuate without the constant dynamics of rhythm. Our oscillated and numb psyche tends to forget itself in the rhythm and starts to contemplate and to see together with the poet."

Therefore, both of them, the rhythm and the symbol are forms that are brought from self by inner sensation and from the nature or the world by extrinsic sensation by the artist. Therefore these are restricted and shaped in a special form, thus made authentic.

According to Maupassant: "A work of art is competent only when it becomes the complete expression of both a symbol and a reality at the same time."

The work of art that explains reality in the highest level is the best work of art institutionally. However, art that expresses well is competent art. Behind the symbol the world of the artist appears. Through this world of the artist a whole world appears. The artist is a human being in the world; the symbol is any symbol of the world. These two bring a particular aspect to the world by being a construction and artificial entity. In this context they make the artist sovereign to the world. According to this, the artist is not who obeys but someone who incises, sees, and interprets.

Accordingly, the rhythm or the manipulated flow becomes the crucial precondition of the symbol.

There is no tempo in nature or in the world, what is the flux in nature or in the world is transformed into rhythm in the human world.

Therefore the rhythm appears as a time component of the human psyche rather than one of the world. **BP**

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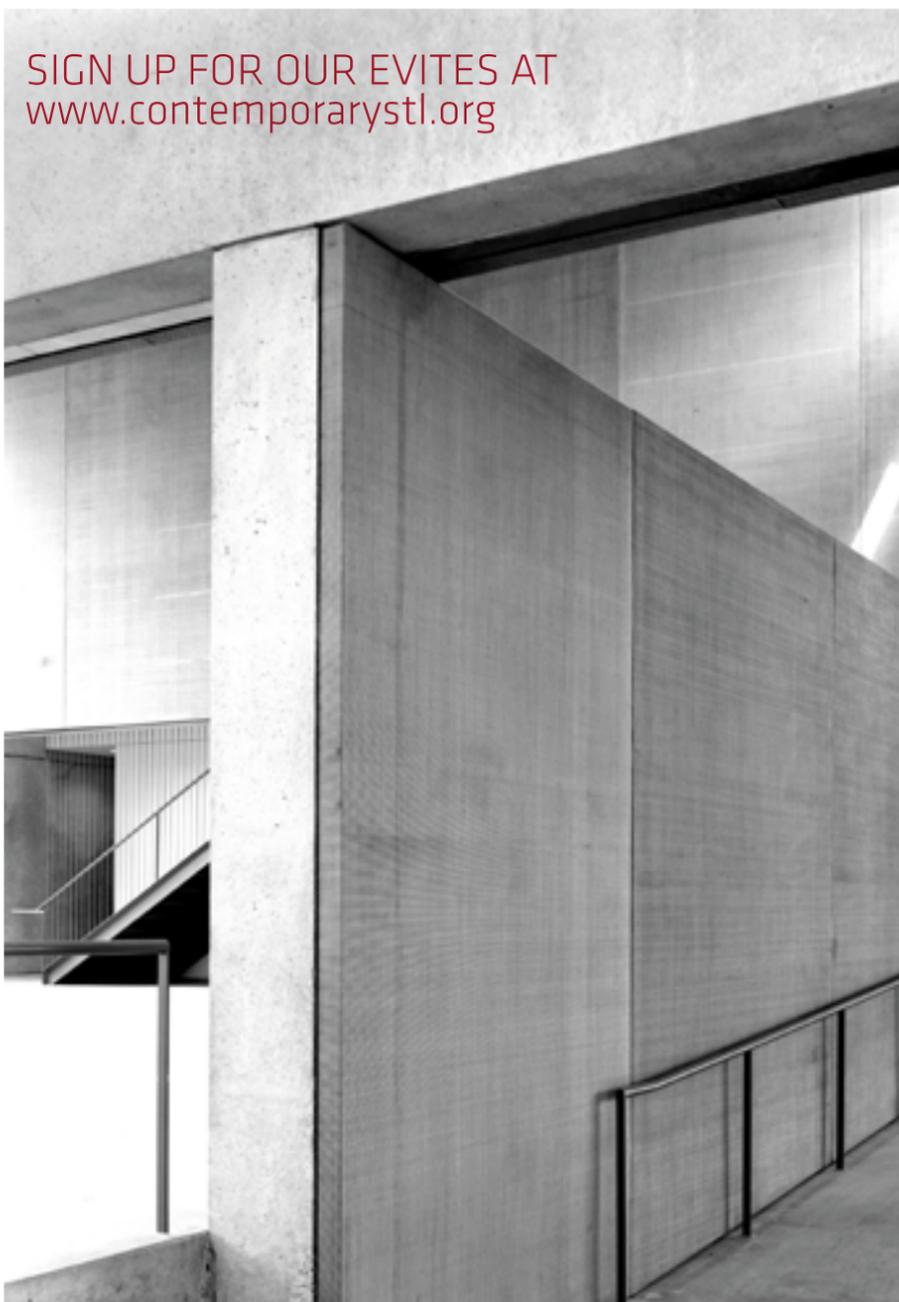
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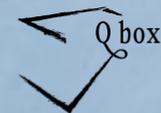
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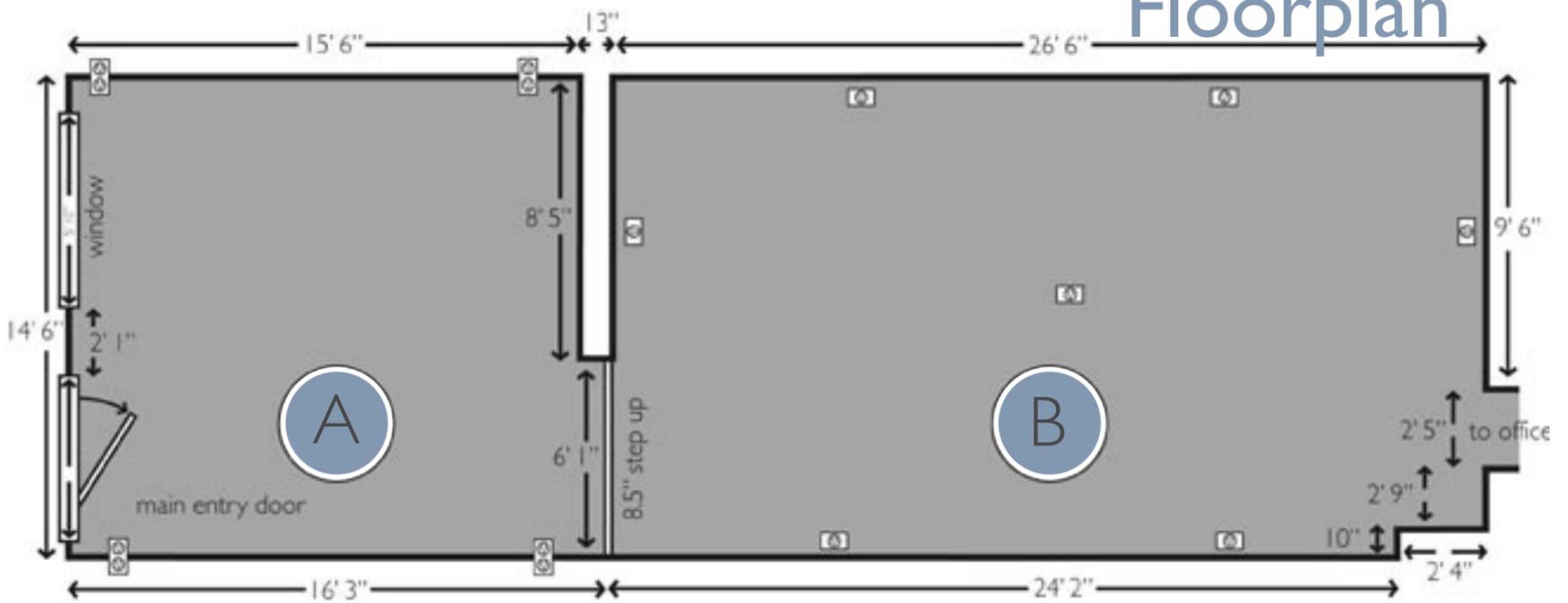


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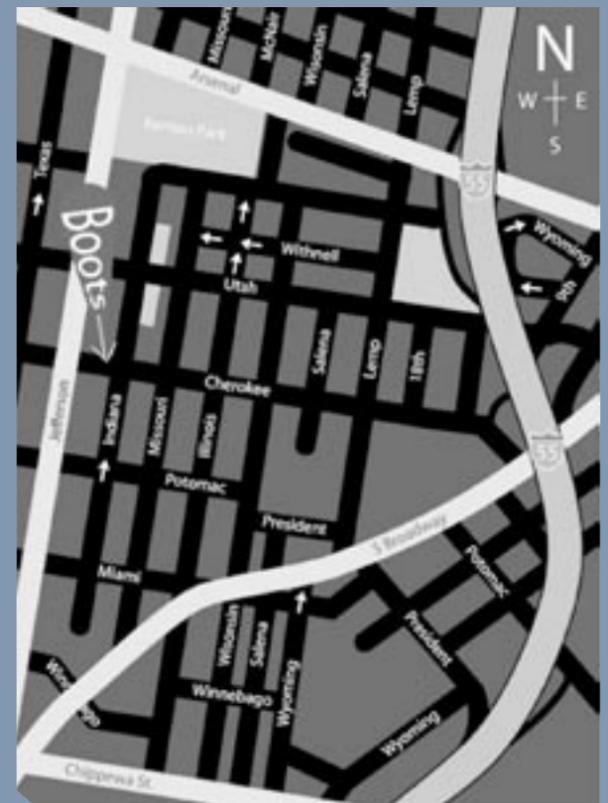
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