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CURATOR CURATOR

Initiated by
Enough Room for Space
2008 - 2010

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INTRODUCTION

The Higher Institute of Fine Arts (HISK) organises postgraduate education in the field of the audiovisual and visual arts. It provides approximately twenty-five young artists from Belgium and abroad with a studio of their own for the duration of two years along with specific, tailor-made guidance. At the HISK, emphasis lies mainly on individual practice with an international focus. The visiting lecturers are crucial. Artists, curators, critics and theoreticians pay individual studio visits at regular intervals. There are also frequent visits to significant art events and lectures, seminars and workshops are provided. The HISK also offers technical facilities and production opportunities.

Thanks to the unique HISK concept, the participants are given every opportunity to invest in critical research of their work in order to situate it within a broader artistic, cultural and societal context. Since 1997, 159 laureates have graduated from the HISK. The largest part of them are currently building up a successful professional career in the Belgian and international art world.

A course centred on artistic practice only makes sense when it extends beyond the walls of the Institute. Artistic projects in which all or several (candidate-) laureates can participate are seized as opportunities in which candidate-laureates can gain experience in all aspects of exhibition practices.

Since spring 2007, the HISK is based in a part of a still active army barracks, the Leopoldskazerne, in Ghent. Artists and soldiers are keeping an eye on each other. After ten years of residency in Antwerp, the new facilities in Ghent offered new and challenging opportunities. The first floor of the main building, the former mess of the officers, houses a nice space that was already used as an exhibition space when the Museum of Fine Arts was temporarily located there between 2004 and 2006. Instead of using this space only as a showcase for the works of our own candidate-laureates, we opted to open it up for activities and exhibitions that went beyond our own institute. In doing so, HISK connected itself with its natural partners and nearest neighbours: with the dynamic contemporary art world in Ghent – with SMAK, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and KIOSK (the project space of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts).

One of our candidate-laureates, Maarten Vanden Eynde (with Maaike Gouwenberg co-pilot of the artist-run

organisation Enough Room for Space), came up with the proposal of the project 'Curator Curator', a platform for young curators and their practice in relation to (young) artists.

Based on the principal of an open call, five projects were selected and realised during 2008 and 2009. Each of these exhibitions can be seen as a research on the different forms of co-operation between curator(s) and artist(s).

Looking back on what started as a little jump into the unknown – which is always a good start – one can see how these exhibitions gave us an insight into the specific dynamics of the relations between artists, curators, producers and the viewers. It was also a rather interesting time – often full of tension – for the candidate-laureates who had to deal with invited 'strangers'. But also in this case, the initial hesitation was quickly transformed into lively discussions.

Nevertheless, what was striking at the end, is the (still) unsolved diversity of tensions between artists and curators in, what sometimes looks as an over-professionalised, by curatorial training programs dominated, art world. Luckily, also a lot of young curators are aware of this unbalance between the power of curators and the autonomy of the artists. The project 'Curator Curator' was therefore indeed an exercise in how the relation between artist and curator could be reinforced or reinvented. Many (young) artists have difficulties in defining their position towards the phenomenon of curatorship. Attitudes can vary from sheer hostility to a kind of being the slave of the curator for opportunistic reasons. And also curators often don't have enough empathy towards the artist and his or her work. One can feel a lack of insight in what it is to be an artist working in the studio today. This leads sometimes to over ambitious concepts with no account to the possible consequences.

Each development of an exhibition proposal should be an inquiry and investment in the way we can go along with each other, how we can take care of each other (from the Latin *curare*, as we all know). Only then it's possible to make it happen and to realise what was originally only dreamed or put on paper.

Acknowledgements

We like to thank all artists and curators who were involved in this project 'Curator Curator'. Sometimes they had to work under restricted conditions, time and money wise, but thanks to the efforts of the HISK-team and the candidates all went right at the end. A special mention goes to the five graphic designers, all Masters from the Saint-Lucas University College for Visual Arts in Ghent, who worked together with the curators on the design of the posters and/or invitation cards.

The Flemish Community, Department of Culture, generously supported the series of 'Curator Curator'. The Dutch Embassy and Gdansk 2016 provided additional support for Curator #3.

Last but not least, thanks to Maarten Vanden Eynde and Maaïke Gouwenberg for their dynamism, creativity, generosity and patience.

Hans Martens, Artistic Director HISK

CURATOR CURATOR

As a typical Enough Room for Space project CURATOR CURATOR emerged out of a marriage between an open space or question, and a personal specific interest or focus on a problematic contemporary issue. In this case artistic director Hans Martens of the Higher Institute for Fine Arts (HISK) in Ghent gave *carte blanche* for a project to take place in the exhibition space of the HISK.

Our proposal, CURATOR CURATOR, provided an opportunity for emerging curators to develop a project within and with the only post-graduate visual arts institute in Belgium, in order to investigate the current curatorial preoccupation. It seems that more than ever the role and relevance of a curator is being questioned and challenged. Is there still a difference between a curator and an artist? If so, what is it? Can one person do both? What are the borders and limits of curating, and what is the relation between curating and creating?

We gave international curators the chance to experiment and develop a project, which might have been difficult to realise within the context of a regular exhibition venue. The only guidelines at the start of each project were the basic principals of the HISK: to experiment and find possibilities to develop oneself.

The project included studio visits with the participants at the HISK and the possibility to include one or more of these artists in an exhibition concept. This direct exchange and collaboration between artists and curators proved to be very rewarding for everyone, and some of them are still working together. In addition to this, the design work for the exhibition's invitation was created in an experimental collaboration between the invited curators and students from the Graphic Design Department at Sint Lucas Institute in Ghent.

With very little external support the designers and the curators had to work together to come up with suitable designs for their respective exhibitions. For some this collaboration created very fruitful outcomes, but for others the road was so bumpy, or rearing towards an unavoidable dead end, that it was difficult to discern any positive learning experiences. Both situations, and every variation in between, were of course part of, and inherent to, the experimental open structure of the project as a whole.

CURATOR CURATOR #1, *WALL TO WALL* put forward the question: 'Is there a difference between a curator and an artist,'

and 'What is the relation between curating and creating?' Curator/artist Karolin Tampere (NO) wanted to test the boundaries of a working process of a curator in the preparation of an exhibition with just one artist. Together with artist Egill Sæbjörnsson (IS), she managed to make it impossible to call it a solo show in the end. The dialogues and correspondence between curator and artist became part of the exhibition and caused the presupposed roles to dissolve. The result was sharp and fresh: Two walls, which don't face each other and thus don't see what's going on in the other room, have a conversation. They talk about life, the universe, the different objects in the room (like a fake Donald Judd, a poster of Harry Potter, and the Internet Kid), but also about each other and the spectator too. They sing and cry and make it impossible to forget that one is part of this very emotional and extremely funny interaction between two walls. The conversation between Egill and Karolin continues to this very day, and surfaces in various forms.

Lorenzo Bruni (IT) proved that with a little bit of imagination and a lot of goodwill, power play, networking, and bluff, you can even draw in popular and acclaimed artists to make your dream show come true. With artists like Rirkrit Tiravanija, James Lee Byars, Peter Coffin, Bas Jan Ader, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Jonathan Monk and 12 others, he produced the largest show with concern to the amount of works displayed. Twenty-nine minimal, and in many cases conceptual, artworks where spread over the entire building. With *What Is My Name?* Lorenzo Bruni was the first curator to test the limits of the physical exhibition space at the HISK. He even involved the postman to make a work by Dan Rees (*The Postman's Decision Is Final*). In addition, a kids-choir sang the results of the week's Belgian soccer league (by Jonathan Monk) in order to generate a 'new consciousness of the perception of space' for the visitors of the exhibition.

For the third exhibition we decided to push the possibilities of the project to its limits. Because two proposals were very similar, we invited both applicants to join forces and make their exhibition together. Remco de Blaaij (NL) and Kamila Wielebska (PL) began by meeting each other to touch upon the notion and perception of different worlds, different languages and different identities. Together they developed the project *Towards Confluence*, a search for why things come together or why some things are separated and will never meet. With the river as a metaphor they meandered through different

perspectives shown through a wide range of international artists. The cube of the famous Hungarian inventor, sculptor, and professor of architecture Ernő Rubik (Rubik's Cube), was the central work in the exhibition. Step by step they unlocked the different ways in which their search for confluence could be seen.

Adnan Yıldız (TR) had the advantage of being present during the Open Studio's at the HISK, prior to his project. He could speak with the artists for extended periods of time and view their work and working method in the most ideal circumstances. He adapted his exhibition concept because of these encounters, and ultimately invited three artists from the HISK to join the exhibition, *Time-Challenger*, an exhibition about critical reconstruction. Adnan took over the HISK – and the HISK-team – with an incredible combination of the charm and persuasion of a Persian cat; impossible to resist. Technically, it was the most complex exhibition thus far. But the (critical) reconstruction of the exhibition space (compared to the condition in which it was before), the baby-pink wall and four Mac-mini's were definitely worth it; Adnan managed to challenge time. And those who were not open for it could always count on the warm sensation of Adnan purrrrring on your lap, convincing you in the end.

The last show *After All, Everything Is Different In The End* by Jens Maier-Rothe (DE) focused on the notion of listening, and was part of Jens's ongoing research into the various manifestations of sound within fine arts. Twelve artists 'showed' how sound is perceived in many different ways, on various sensory layers, and how everyone has a subjective notion of synchronicity. To practice the simultaneity of senses, there were eight different press releases written by eight different people. In addition to the show, where sounds from inside and outside the building submerged into one space, was a performance by Tisha Mukarji on the stairs of the Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent, a film programme at the OffOff Cinema, and the piece Radio Dinner by Raimundas Malašauskas, broadcasted by Radio Urgent FM in Ghent.

Jens Maier-Rothe's curatorial work amounted into a grand finale for the CURATOR CURATOR project. It caused a lot of verbal fireworks within and outside the HISK, resulting, believe it or not, in an article published in Japan.

Apart from the limitations, the small budget, and the restrictions of the given space/location, CURATOR CURATOR offered a platform to try out new kinds of presentation or

collaboration models between curators, artists, graphic designers, producers, initiators and audiences. CURATOR CURATOR supported a wide variety of curatorial interests and approaches, ranging from different personal encounters with the artists, (re)creating art works from dead or absent artist and the management of the whole production of the exhibition. Between these different players it seemed, at times, like a very delicate ballet performed on a very thin rope and, at other times, like an eclectic and ecstatic gathering culminating in beautiful new artworks and presentations. This process of making shows and trying to find new ways of dealing with all the ingredients through empirical practice is what Sarat Maharaj calls 'thinking through curating.' And that is exactly what we wanted to do from the start: to bring together different thoughts and concepts by ambitious curators and artists and to give them the opportunity to actively think through what curating means now and what it can be in the future.

The opportunity to participate in CURATOR CURATOR was greatly appreciated, and greatly desired. Fifty-four applications from twenty-two different countries were received after an open call in the second year. In the first year three exhibitions were launched and unfortunately there was only enough time and means for two more shows thereafter, which made it extremely difficult to make a selection in the end. The success of the series gave us as initiators a lot of food for thought, regarding the content of the different projects and a possible future residency for a curator at the HISK.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the only postgraduate institute in Belgium would give curators, like the artists, a space to work, make projects and exchange ideas? Throughout their stay, participating curators would have the possibility to get to know the artists and their working methods, give lectures, receive feedback from visiting artists and curators, and to do research for their own exhibition project. They might discover that both practices, artistic and curatorial, are not entirely different but very much the same.

Maaïke (curator) & Maarten (artist)

CURATOR

opening:
12/09/08

at
18:00 u

CURATOR

from:
12/09/08

to
12/10/08

WALL
TO
WALL

Egill
Sæbjörnsson

in
collaboration
with

Karolin
Tampere

open:
thursday
to sunday

from
14:00 u - 18:00 u

address:
Higher Institute for Fine Arts
Charles de Kerchovelaan 187a
9000 Ghent/Belgium



Sweet Simulacrum

I saw Egill play, but I also saw him study.

He was investigating, live, what to make of the dichotomy between reality and fiction, between fact and fantasy. The two performative acts I witnessed (in Amsterdam in October, 2006) simply juxtaposed these principles on stage, not so much to fool the senses but rather to unveil the spectacular contradictions. As if by softly rubbing the real with the represented he might tease us into imagining a new realm of possibilities. might we be able to satisfy

our hunger with a projected apple, could we possibly lay our head to rest on a pillow of light, can we play a tune on a non-existing guitar?

As if he were just amusing himself and improvising in front of us, Egill was actually presenting us, the audience, with a complicated junction. A cross-roads between what we know to be possible and what we desire and dream to be so. The having and the wishing brought together for moment as if magic exists.

Camila Marambio

Conversation #1 WALL TO WALL

And:

(I have much grief because my brother the Neanderthal is dead ... but I am happy that my brother the cat is still alive. Last night I had a talk with my grandfather the tree ... he spoke through wood ... and leaves ... he spoke the tongue of dragons).

Karolin: Hei Egill, It looks like we have come up with a collection of some common threads, in different colors and qualities, and that we now found a possibility to put it all into a combination. So, let's start knitting some nice patterns and paths.

While playing with the forces of the earth's magnetic field of gravity through combining objects and video animations, in one of your pieces *The Ping Pong Dance* (2006), you talk about something that I believe is the core of all of your work. You say: "I get pleasure out of playing with the expectations we have and breaking them. Finding new ways of living life interests me. I think that is a very old human wish to find new ways".

Egill: For me the quotidian life and every day objects is what I deal with the most. In other words: my own normal life. The walls in the room, chairs, tables, doors, things I see in the street etc. I think that the everyday situation is what everyone deals with, even if it is a high philosophical discussion, new theories in mathematics or politics. All of it is connected to the life we live. If we are poor or rich, from the east or the west, south or north, we all deal with the same dilemma: two hands, two legs, one head, left and right hemispheres of the brain, heart and a stomach. I think we are all cells in the same body, the human body. It is not many individual bodies, it is more

or less many copies of the same body. The same origin multiplied. We are all part of the same system. There is only one human being. That is us. There is only one animal kingdom. That is us. There is only one world. That is us. There is no division. I find it interesting to work with everyday objects such as buckets, ping pong balls, lamps, cardboard boxes etc. I am also trying to bring in new ideas for the future to realize. If we turn and twist reality we find new ways. We are not only investigating what exist, we are adding to it, we are creators.

K: Finding new ways of living life, creating your own universes through your artwork, or really transform these into real life? Have you broken any of your own expectations lately?

E: No I am mostly stuck in the same situations over and over again. I think though that with in the span of like, 5 years, certain things do change. Some things advance while others stay still.

K: What about mathematics?

E: Mathematics are logical, but they are fiction as well. They do make a model of the world but they also create new things. In mathematics we are creating new worlds that didn't exist before. We are inventing new spaces as we make new formulas ... like we are creating new space inside the internet. The internet is just as real as the physical space ...

K: You mean what we call cyberspace?

E: Cyberspace is theoretically larger than the universe ... NASA is going to spend more money on investigating the internet in the future, than investigating outer space. Since cyberspace is simultaneously theoretical and real, who knows if the physical world isn't as well? We have seen a lot of movies about these things, and according

to *What the bleep do we know*, we are not speculating right now, but rather creating. Meaning that when we think these thoughts we actually affect the world.

K: So, you mean that with our little interview here we are creating a new world?

E: Yes ... he he he ...

K: What about the theory of relativity?

E: Albert Einstein invented the theory of relativity ... it is not a final explanation. Einstein said that the world is endlessly crazy ... and that we will never discover what it is all about. He said that all theories, even his own are like photographs of the world, not the world itself. As an example if we take a photograph of a coffee mug on a table, we see a two dimensional reproduction of the actual mug not the mug itself ... the photo is never the object itself and is always incomplete. The same is to be said about all theories, they are an image of the situation. They are always incomplete because they are not the situation itself.

K: And what about the use of a Donald Judd sculpture within your work?

E: The sculpture has the same role as the portrait of Harry Potter, or the statue of the Internet Kid. It is a transmitter of information. I do that to bring in the point that all styles and all objects have an effect on us. The Donald Judd sculpture, just like the other objects in the room has affected human mankind. All the people that have read Harry Potter have a 'Harry Potter' point of view on the world, even though it is supposed to be 'a fiction'. We all know that scientists today, are hugely influenced by old Science Fiction books such as *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley.

K: So you mean that Donald Judd sculptures actually do radiate information that can change the world, like the books about Harry Potter did?

E: Yes.

K: I got a bit interested in a quote I found from you talking about your piece *Lampi* (2007):

“ Looking at an object is a mixture of memory and the new experience. Half of what we see is constructed from information based on former experiences stored in the nervous system. This information helps us to identify what we see, and help us to find our way through the world. Because of this we don't see everything in the environment. Reading the environment is a great talent that is trained communally by the human race. ”

E: Yes, I think that we are trained. I am tired of the everyday sometimes, because it is so much repetition. I feel obliged to be kind and prudent. Being revolutionary seems so bloody difficult and so bloody hard to stand up to.

K: That is something that *Mr Piano & Mrs Pile* (2005) are discussing, the daily life, the repetition in their existence, issues related to the core of the materials they are made of. A situation one can look upon as limited, but while observing them, it opens up for something more. Perhaps a new way of looking at things? Like here for example (excerpt from *Mr Piano & Mrs Pile's* dialogue):

“ – Mr Piano, how is it like to be a Piano?
– Well, I don't really feel like a piano.
– No?
– No.
– No?
– No ...
– How do you feel then?
– Me?
– Yes, you ...
– Well I, I feel a bit fake.
– Right.
– Do you ever get the feeling that you are never really what you are, that you are not really a banana if you are a banana, or an apple if you are an apple?
– Right.
– That the whole world is just a projection, and that our three-dimensional world really is not there.
– I know what you mean, today I feel completely two-dimensional I feel like I was made out of chip-wood.
– But we are Mrs. Pile!
– I suppose so. ”

E: Yes. *Mr Piano & Mrs Pile* talk about everything they can talk about which is their environment. Using dialogue in that piece was also to point out that talking is one of the languages. Using colors is another. Or using forms is another. A Donald Judd sculpture is a pouring non-verbal dialogue. It is a shower of words, radiating at a slow but constant speed into modern society. Everything talks, a painting talks, walls talk, every day objects talk, people talk etc.

K: In the work *You Take all My Time* (2002) which is an installation-stage-like-world inside a bubble, in the middle of the floor, based on one of your songs, you point out that there are visual elements that take on our preconceived ideas about certain icons from history, and the way they can control us through fear and myths.

E: O yes, it is kind of showing how certain images and issues control us even though we would have liked to have nothing to do with them.

There are elements in the piece like the atom bomb of the Cold War terror, fear of being a racist, etc ... The work is also pointing out myths and preconceived ideas of modern life.

K: About fear and myths, it was really funny to read your email about the Snowman, because I had just been thinking about it, of course, still while I was walking in the mountains, but also before that. I like the Yeti, the huge found footprints, the big hairy creature. I clearly remember the first time I got to know about Yeti, it was through the 'facts pages' in a cartoon, I think it must have been The Phantom. There were detailed drawings and a text about the Yeti that during that time had been seen in the Himalayas. For me it was kind of amazing to read this on the 'facts pages' as a kid, I mean, I really wanted to believe in it. Still Yeti foot-prints sounds surreal, the idea of a huge hairy man in the mountains. But it is, I guess, narrow minded to not believe in the existence of these creatures ...

E: The Yeti is also a bit of a 60's and 70's phenomena from the James Bond era of the Cold War. No one really believes in it anymore. But then I saw an article in the newspaper about scientists that recently found hairs in the Himalayas that they cannot genetically identify to any other animals of that area. And there have also been found large footsteps recently. So the myth of the Abominable Snowman still keeps groups of scientists on their toes. If we would find the Yeti and he stopped being such a myth he would just become one of the animal kingdom and no wonder any more. We would say: Ah, yes and then there is this big monkey in the Himalayas that they only found 2008, incredible they found it so late.

K: From my point of view I still have expectations from those childhood far away places, cities one only know by name, small dots on the map, that in the core of the expectation remain containing something magic, different and real.

E: Exactly, I also think it is nice to have expectations and to hope and dream ... what a boring world it would be without it. I have always wanted to rewrite *The Little Match Girl* by H.C. Andersen, I wanted to change her fate. It seems like we are living in a story someone wrote. It is all a hoax. We are merely two-dimensional figures, an illustration in a book. Who cooked me up? I guess Dali did.

K: I was thinking of stones, in several of your sculptures, you have been combining animation onto objects, creating projections with light, shadows and colors on the wall, which, along with a soundtrack, often created with sounds created using the same objects. In your sculpture/installation *Three Stones* (2007) you make three stones float and take on different colors. I experience

these stones as your volcanic Iceland, resembling something ancient.

Talking about Moving Rocks, there are those at Death Valley California. The reason why they move along the 10,000 year old dried up clay lakebed is still a mystery. Several teams of scientists have tried to explain the movement, but the actual moment of migration of the rocks has never been witnessed by anyone as far as one know. This is a very interesting phenomenon. Experiments have been done to separate rocks 'walking together'. By moving them long distances away from each other, but after a long period of time, the rocks have still managed to locate their 'partner', and continued their journey. One can see their movements because they do leave tracks. There are trails moving up-hills and in directions not made possible by the wind for example ... The size of these rocks are also quite amazing, they are not small stones ... (<http://mmmmgroup.altervista.org/e-rocks.html>).

E: I have made works about stones a few times. The oldest piece was made 1997 in Iceland. It was something like 18 photographs of the same stone from different angles. The stone was on a hill near the farm where I spent many summers as a kid and teenager outside Reykjavik. I felt that walking to the stone had a magical effect on me and walking around it also twisted my mind. I showed the photographs in an exhibition and made an animation out of them where the stone rotates. I was perhaps trying to move the stone or to give it the power to move. It does move even though it is still. Still life images have the element of time in them, just as moving images do. They 'pour information' silently, like TV does violently. The stone moves in its stillness, if you know what I mean. It is all magic. The most quotidian things are magical.

K: What about dragons?

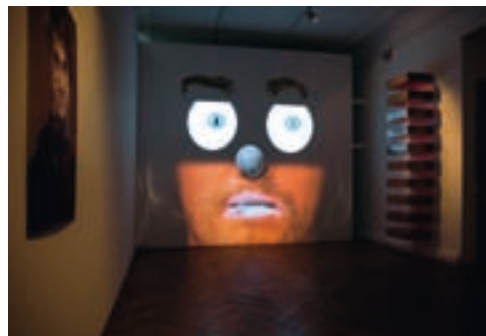
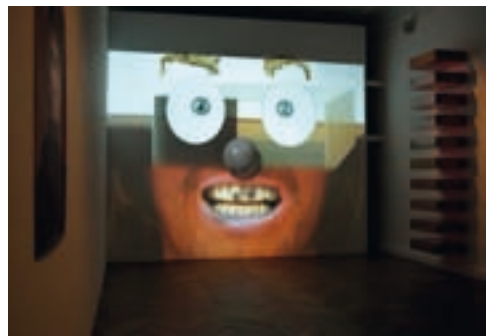
E: I was thinking ... that dragons might have been still existing around the year 450 ... Maybe we killed them all. I think that Loch Ness did exist too. I think that these myths might be true. Who knows? And I think that all of these creatures have something to do with us. We are all related, I mean, there must be an original start of all living forms ... right? ONE forefather, a kind of a god ... but he or she or it is more theoretical than real ... just like the genetic Eve and Adam are theoretical, not real ... and cyberspace is kind of theoretical.

K: Who are Wall to Wall?

E: They might be the same person. I am not sure. I guess they have taken on a life of their own. We have created a Frankenstein figure ... a Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde, doppelganger phenomenon. The doppelganger is a well known phenomenon in literature and as well within visual arts when

we pose two objects together. They also represent the left and the right hemispheres of the brain. When you are in-between Wall to Wall you

are dealing with yourself ... we are always facing ourselves as we face others.
Best, Egill



Conversation #2 PHENOMENON OF THE MIND AND HOW WE SEE THE WORLD

Karolin: You describe a loop in your production; while working with objects you see music and in the music there is a possible 2D image, which you then present in another way through projections. Like drawing music videos. It's as if music becomes an image again. The work is in a constant state of flux, like you, who also changes positions, formats, and persona. I'm curious to hear a bit more about how you started to develop your music. What do you think was influencing you and why?

Egill: I was born in 1973. Since the 1980s artists, such as David Byrne, were working with both music and art. I somehow knew very early on that this was my thing, or it seemed to be the thing to do if you wanted to be an interesting artist. Classical music interested me as much as new media. I guess I try to react to what I have seen in art. I made a piece for an exhibition in Kunsthalle Wien in 2000 called *The thinker exists between theories*, which shows that we take in everything we see and read and try to make something of our own. It's normal to be interested in many subjects at the same time, I guess? A multidisciplinary approach is also very Icelandic, or 'small village like.' For example, my grandfather Oddur Andr sson was a farmer, a tree planter, an organist at a church his whole life, and he started three male choirs. He would bike thirty kilometers to a rehearsal sometimes and he had very little tuition in music.

K: Did you play in a band as a teenager?

E: I played guitar in a band from the age of 14 until around 16. Then I left

music entirely because I was deeply into Tibetan studies and trying to empty my mind of all the 'pollution' in culture.

K: Why? What happened?

E: My master or teacher in Tibetan studies forbade me to play and listen to rock music, or actually any music at all. I took it very seriously then. Nevertheless, I made music secretly. I had an electric guitar and a Marshall guitar amp stack that I played very loudly in my room.

K: So when did you release your first album?

E: In 1998. At the end of that same year, I moved to Berlin. There I got to know people who had also recently moved there. We used to hang out in certain clubs. Most of them were musicians. I felt like giving the visual arts a break. In Berlin I finished *The International Rock 'n Roll Summer of Egill S bj rnsson*, which I released in Iceland on my own in fifty home-made copies. I had made the decision to be a virtual Pop star, with no concerts on stage, only music videos.

K: Did you want to become a Pop star?

E: I adored all the pop stars I grew up with in the 1980s, so I was definitely thrilled by the idea. When my videos were played on MTV, I felt like I had reached a peak in my life. I had hoped that somebody from Virgin Records would contact me. And they did. It's so strange how wishes come true. But when they suddenly came I felt overwhelmed.

K: So you didn't sign up with Virgin, but you kept on making music?

E: I continued making music, releasing a few self-made records and collaborating on music with a few visual artists

and friends like Klaus Weber, Susan Philipsz and Daria Martin.

K: What about music as part of your sculptures and installations?

E: Many of my works include a layer of interpretation as music scores. That is just an extra bonus. It is not the aim of most of the pieces. I have explored it quite directly in such works as *Various Projections* (2007), *Monkey Music* (2004), *Sónata í G-dúr* (2006) and *Ping-Pong Dance* (2006), to mention a few.

K: You often work with everyday objects.

E: Yes. I think that the biggest questions and answers are right in front of our noses.

K: Sound and music could be a good way of reaching people. I mean, it has this recognisable language and it enters through senses other than sight. Your songs, melodies, and lyrics are something a larger audience can relate to. They're sad, humorous, mocking and beautiful. Does music allow for more experimental possibilities?

E: I would not say more possibilities for experimentation but music today reaches more people, that is true. I find that most pop music today is not as radical as it was in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s when it embraced agendas concerned with social behavior, sexuality and image. However, a message is still conceived very strongly through music. It is great. Wonderful. I guess exploring music is exactly the same as exploring visual things. Even nowadays we use similar tools for making music and videos and things.

K: Do you write a lot?

E: I'm very interested in language. It is also something we can take apart

and continue developing. There are immense possibilities for the future of language – huge even, the size of Sahara. They say that before there were words for things there was only melodies and emotional input. Printed or written texts are a limited source, don't you think?

K: Yes I agree. I have seen that stones are an important element in your work. They often manifest in your lyrics, sculptures and videos.

E: I think stones are just something lying around that you can take with you. It's easy to do something with them. They're somehow a basic material, just a mass on planet Earth.

K: Working in multiple layers, either with vocal harmonies, projections, or sculptures, one common denominator is space. You're claiming a space of your own for everything you do and animating the in-animate. A parallel example is your interest in the expansion of the human mind. And that is what you're actually experimenting with in some ways: Challenging the mind and, of course, the preconceived ideas we have. You also deal with the wonders of the universe and science fiction.

E: Yes I am interested in the phenomenon of the mind and how we see the world through the ideas we have. We don't see the world from other points of view, even though there are plenty of them. We simply haven't seen them. There are new Americas to be found. Plenty of them. Endless New Worlds. Right?

K: I remember you saying that 'a person has to be like an acrobat. Acting like a monkey in a tree, holding many branches at the same time, while reaching in many directions and learning step by step.'

E: We need to re-activate many other human skills that have been abandoned or regarded as unimportant since the beginning of the technological revolution. Obviously an academic can solve many things, but we need more than that. I see the modern person as an acrobatic monkey in a big tree. It looks backwards and forwards, up and down, and has to connect many skills to be able to climb in the tree. Nothing is still.

K: I guess you mean challenging the mind through expansive thinking, with the irrational and surreal, like in chemistry where elements transform from water into ice and fog, then back into water again. As we're coming to the end of this conversation, I'd like to ask you one last question. I remember we once talked about shape-shifters. What is your interest in that phenomenon?

E: Shape-shifting is a common theme in mythology and folklore, as well as science fiction and fantasy. It's the ability of a person or an animal to change their physical appearance. In fact, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution is about the transformation of species. Species are supposed to have changed over a span of time. That is a transformation. We are all shape-shifters. Slow ones.

This is an edited short version from the text *7 Minutes and a Red Guitar*, a conversation between Egill and Karolin, Berlin vs Sørfinnset. (Full length text can be found in Egill Sæbjörnsson *The Book* published by argobooks, 2009).

Conversation #3 THE JUNGLE, THE FUTURE AND HOW EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED

Karolin: I would like this conversation to give our reader more information concerning the process behind *Wall to Wall* and show how this piece is intertwined, and closely related to, your practice in general. It's interesting to communicate the process of how it came to be, how it was originally presented, and how it continued to grow into its current state. Perhaps this is the moment to reveal the absolute first idea I had when I thought to invite you to brainstorm for the first Curator Curator exhibition at HISK in Ghent with me.

Egill: Yes, you wanted to do a show with many of my pieces together in one space, into some sort of a jungle exhibition, where the works would kind of mix up with each other. Inspired by this, I dug up an old idea of two trolls that, from opposite ends of a space, would talk to each other.

K: Perhaps we should describe the *Wall to Wall* installation in more detail so that our reader can picture it better? Since the first presentation of this work in HISK, it has developed further. It grew almost to its double size, as seen part of your solo presentation at Reykjavik Art Museum in 2009.

E: Sure. In HISK it was presented as one installation taking over both rooms in the exhibition space. As part of the work there is a (fake) Donald Judd sculpture, a Harry Potter poster, and a kid sitting in front of a computer by a table in the corner amongst other objects. The projected Walls also see the visitors that enter the space and try to understand who they are and what they are doing there.

K: Exactly. And the Walls eventually end up talking about the evolution of mankind and the evolution of things on Earth.

E: Yes, right? And to add to this, as you mention, we took elements such as burgundy painted walls, objects in glass vitrines and paintings, to make it look museum-like. That positioned the spectator in a place familiar to him or her. It is good to start in a place we know and then try to draw a line that goes somewhere far off.

K: And then there are the found objects, the puzzle, horns of a ram and the spider, amongst other. Actually most of them come from the flea market. It could have been anything. Anything can be seen as abstract and be connected with prehistory in some ways.

E: Exactly.

K: Is the *Wall to Wall* piece finished now? Are the final touches made, or do you look upon it as something organic, continuing to grow or change?

E: I think it is more or less finished. But what we did for the show at Reykjavik Art Museum was to adapt the piece to the exhibition space.

K: Right. If someone decided to spend the time (63 minutes) and follow the whole conversation between the walls, they will realise that it's quite entertaining. Rewarding fun. The speech is based on a text we co-wrote. It was a part of the process of production that I really enjoyed. Most of your characters have some kind of verbal language which make up a significant part of their character. As well as working on these, you also work on your song lyrics. What inspires you to write dialogues?

E: Since I was a boy I have been making up stories with my brother. So writing

comes very easy for me. One could say that I go into a trance, like when two kids are playing together.

W1: Tell me

W2: Yes

W1: How is it to be over there, on the other side?

W2: The other side?

W1: Yes the other side

W2: What do you mean by that?

W1: Well, you ARE on the other side of the room

W2: And ... ?

W1: Isn't it different?

W2: Yes, what do you mean?

W1: How does it look over there?

W2: Here?

W1: Yes

W2: I don't know, I suppose I see more or less the same things as you.

I can see you but you cannot see yourself. And you see me but I cannot see myself.

W1: Aha ... yes ... that is right ...

W2: Why are you asking?

W1: Well ... I had to ask something ...

W2: Aha ...

K: Perhaps what the Walls are discussing is how we think things will look in the future? Each generation has its ideas and projections of what the future can bring. How do you think art will look in the future, in thirty years? What do you think will be important, what and how will artists deal within the concept of art?

E: Well, it is difficult to predict. I think I am unable to do that. However, I made a huge discovery recently when I took my age, 36, and divided it by the time passed since the birth of Christ. I wanted to know how many times 36 years have passed between then and now. To my surprise I found out that it is only 55.8 times. I imagined year 0 to be an incredibly long time ago. But 56 lifetimes is somehow not so long. The same realisation came over me when I applied the number to the time passed since the first cities on earth were built. It is only 333 times my age away into the past. What about you? How do you think it will develop?

K: I hope that art will develop more in the direction of ideas and cater less to market values. It would be interesting

to see what happened if contemporary art became as popular as sports ... That's my vision of the future.

E: I see ... why should art be popular?

K: To make people think more. More awareness would create a better world?

E: I agree. More education. More talking. Like the Walls ...

K: You are known in Iceland to be part of the Fun Generation? What is that?

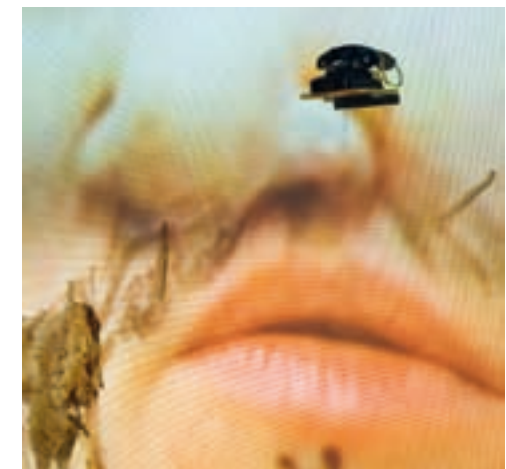
E: It is very understandable that some people have called my generation the Fun Generation. Fun was one of the things that was missing in art at the time I was studying. I guess we just wanted to do something that was not being done. To be against something. To shake things up. There was no fun, there was no music and there was no narrative material. The minimal approach had somehow stripped down and wiped out the wild. Using music with videos was ridiculed. Narrative was present in either literature or film, not art. I guess we were also sensing the atmosphere of the 1990's when fashion was being explored (such as Purple Prose and Silvie Fleury) and Pipilotti Rist came about, and Beck Hansen (grandson of Al Hansen, a fluxus artist) was a big influence. The 1990's was a big moment for music in terms of it breaking through into the visual arts with works such as *Rock my religion* by Dan Graham, that I remember seeing at Centre de Pompidou in 1995 for the first time. I was an exchange student in Paris between 1995 and 1996, and at the Pompidou I saw *Heidi* by Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley which is kind of a fun take on Wiener Aktionismus. I consider myself a part of this generation of fun but I have always been aware of the banality of mono-channeling-one's practice. It is in my nature to not like too much categorisations. When I

look back on the minimal art in Iceland at the time I can see a lot of fun in this too – a playfulness that I was not able to see at that time. I guess I was lacking the overview.

K: Perhaps you could say something about how you see art intertwined with society, our surroundings, our imagination as well as our ideas? How is everything connected?

E: The Walls are trying to see how we are stuck inside a narrow image of our world. We have to know about the past to be able to position ourselves. By looking at ourselves on a time-line, by knowing what happened before a given moment, we can better predict the future. More interestingly, situating ourselves as a product of the past can reveal what we are capable of and how we continue emerging. It is also interesting to look at statistics. It is 99% sure that in the future there will be species that are different from those roaming today. That feels surreal and impossible today, but it is very likely. Things like this make me try to see the world in terms of a broad spectrum, in order to see the magic in the world happening, everywhere around us.

Egill Sæbjörnsson & Karolin Tampere





HORNS OF A RAM

Everything had to have something to be something. Something without a purpose didn't seem to exist. Rams had horns. They were their pride. They could use them to hit other rams when fighting for territories. If the horns would fall off they would usually not die but lose a part of their personality. The horns were an important part of their selfimage just like knowledge was.



FASCINATION

Person sat on stones contemplating. Because of their ability to think, humans created ideas about everything. They lived in a bubble of ideas interwoven with reality. As we could see in this little image over here the world was a rounded place with mountains, sky, grass, houses, animals and stones.



HEAD

This could be a sculpture of a face or an idea of a face or just a pile of ceramics.

#1



SPIDER

Spiders had eight legs, a body and eyes. They multiplied regularly and the old ones died. They mostly crawled on the ground or in trees or on walls. There were millions of different kinds of spiders and they existed for a billion years.

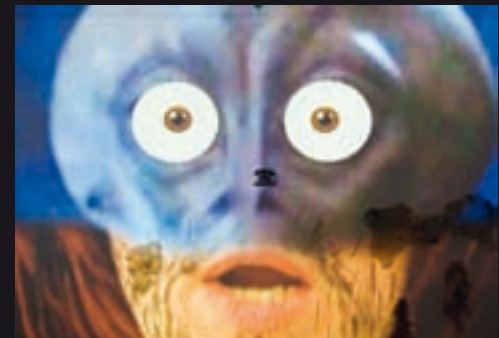


PUZZLE

Cities started forming about 12,000 BC. The image on this puzzle showed a city that was called Hong Kong by the end of the 20th century AC.



#1



THIS TRICKSTER IS GOING TO MAKE JERKY OUT OF YOUR SOUL

Diego Fernández and Camila
Marambio talking about Egill
Sæbjörnsens's work

I recently saw Egill play at the ABC fair in Berlin, it was just him on stage, he had a silly blond wig and was strumming an acoustic guitar, he seemed shy ... a friendly gesture at such an event. I had to listen so hard to be able to catch the words of his song: "I Love You So" ...

I saw Egill at the Bowery Poetry Club in New York, smeared with some black stain, looking more or less like a hobo ... even though it was just a music show (no video) he managed to keep the audience captive from the moment he opened his mouth ...

... now I think he was almost trying to go unnoticed, to be invisible ... more precisely, he was being precarious ...

... well, you know, when Egill walks alone "he talks to stones" – a very Icelandic thing to do, I suppose – ... remember that video-sculpture piece with the volcanic stones floating down to the bottom of the screen, moaning until they finally match shapes and go AAAhhhhh? I really like that one ...

... wasn't it a branch? It seemed to be just a shadow on the wall but then you suddenly realize it is not a shadow, but instead a projection of the shadow's shape on the wall ...

... in any case, Egill is far beyond being "The Icelandic Beck" as someone once put it ... well yes, he is a very talented, multi-instrumentalist blonde guy with a keen ear and a knack for eclectic weird voices and sounds, a sort of eternal down-to-earth feeling and a millenary wisdom that comes out of a soul geyser etc ...

... Egill is never what you'd expect, he is forever playing with expectations, faking them, twisting them. In Egill's work, you think you know what you're looking at,

then, unsuspectingly, it all breaks apart and turns into ... a projection of light, something immaterial, surreal. You think he's playing the guitar and then the sound turns out to be a playback and the guitar suddenly dissolves and flies away ...

George, the dumb-wise guy, the naïve vagabond who joins the game eyes shut ... the toothless black consciousness guy who's all eyes and mouth and wants to "have PHecSss!" ... Mr. Piano & Ms. Pile ... all of these characters break the mold of our Icelandic stereotype, they are at once funny, exotic flavors and abhorrent subconscious twists of the, again, I guess, Icelandic mental establishment (paradoxically, so called "globalization" exacerbates nationality, and yes, it's already hard to separate "the Icelandic" out of a guy called *Eagle, Son of the Sea Bear*).

And what about Egill's technique, his tricks on perception, a game of real and projected images, not a reality versus non-materiality but a symbiotic relation that speaks of the world we live in today, where The Real, The Body, The Voice, The Light and All References so often seem to coincide ... the magic of an assumed simultaneity constantly colliding before our eyes ...

... he's suggesting we should question our tools to recognize The Real and he does so by tossing at us heavy unanswered philosophical questions about what we trust to be the established truth from a scenario that appears too childish, playful, where trusting one's eyes and language seems obvious, sometimes even dumb.

Scene, Berlin: He enters as a ghost, his meditational non-thoughts become visible in color rings, his consciousness (or is it his soul ... is it God?) shows up and He is black (well, he's like a cartoon, he's Al Green, he's definitely not from Iceland, Egill plays characters from the history of movies and music with the natural approach of both an expert collector and someone plain, just bored, alone with his videoclub membership card ...

a very contemporary self-imposed disease: being in charge of the "director's cut" and the "making off" of your own pathetic existence) they talk about desire, will, possibility, suddenly Egill starts bouncing a big red ball, LA LA LA LA LA, The End.

Loose ends and open discourses that appear to be mistakes (or mistaken, or misplaced) end up being wide doors opening unto very serious, interesting matters brought to the table while being – or pretending to be – silly in public. The synchronicity between projections and the performer's body displacement (objects and voice too) shows us that it has been rehearsed extensively, worked thoroughly and dealt with in detail, a very well resolved technical element that, once understood, leads you to abstraction and a quest for the deeper, unresolved meanings, enunciations and extensions of the play.

Bumping of temporalities and context switching, how do they coexist? Simultaneity of directions, of readings, of interpretations and focus points ... ways of perception ...

How is Egill's work "honest"? Like a child is honest, in that he creates complex worlds, characters, realities and conversations that instantly dissolve and remain unconcluded as soon as it's time to either go to bed or run off to lunch? How do our philosophical divagations connect with our daily problems when their overbearing presence becomes unimportant in the face of other, bigger, terrible, unexpected realities?

Egill's presentations have always at least one moment of complete awe (ooohhh) not necessarily the apex, but a moment of Real Magic, when things fly out of his mouth, when something that seemed to be clear goes back to be a mystery. This is when the game of overlapping projections matches the holes in The Real and we are forced to try and fill the empty parts of the picture ...

Maurizio Nannucci, *Scrivere sull'acqua* (Writing on Water),
36 photographs documenting writing on water, 1973



At
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www.hisk.edu

Curator Curator is a project initiated by
Maarten Vanden Eynde and Maaike Grouwenberg
www.enoughroomforpaint.org



The Chairman and Members of the Board of Administration
and the HISK team and Enough Room for Space, kindly invite you to the exhibition

Curator Curator #2

8 to 23 November 2008, Thursday to Sunday, 2 to 6 pm

Opening
Friday, 7 November 2008, 6 pm

What is my name?

Project on the incommunicability of the present communication
Curated by
Lorenzo Bruni

With	&
Mario Airò	Bas Jan Ader
Simone Berti	James Lee Byars
Rossella Biscotti	Félix González-Torres
Nina Beier & Marie Lund	Jiri Kovanda
Peter Coffin	Maurizio Nannucci
José Dávila	
Mario García Torres	
Koo Jeong-A	
Jonathan Monk	
Dan Rees	
Lorenzo Scotto di Luzio	
Nedko Solakov	
Rirkrit Tiravanija	

WHAT IS MY NAME?

Project on the incommunicability of present communication.

Curated by Lorenzo Bruni

With interventions from: Mario Airò, Nina Beier and Marie Lund, Simone Berti, Rossella Biscotti, Peter Coffin, José Dávila, Mario García Torres, Koo Jeong-A, Jonathan Monk, Dan Rees, Lorenzo Scotto di Luzio, Nedko Solakov, Rirkrit Tiravanija

With works of: James Lee Byars, Bas Jan Ader, Jiri Kovanda, Maurizio Nannucci, Félix González-Torres.

Why am I me (myself)? Am I me (myself) in respect to others and to the codification of the world or vice versa? Perhaps in this time we need a bit of oblivion regarding the way we communicate and handle the real in order to be able to reflect on how we perceive and communicate it and on who we really are.

The artists invited for this project, through small interventions and signs, aim to create in the spectator a new consciousness of perception of space in the precise moment in which he walks through and discovers it. The exhibition space of the HISK school is already in itself a hybrid between that of a place of memory and that of a new 'white cube' structure: between that of an intimate space as the home and that of a space emptied of all traces of everyday life. As a result, the works proposed of for this occasion are able to increase the possibility to make the 'public' reflect on what is intended as communication and on the relationship between public and private dimension. What is really intimate and personal or completely public today?

News about distant tragedies capture our attention in an intimate way as they invade our private space in real time through television and internet. Yet at the same time, we react to personal problems with the eyes of a distant observer. If man in the 1900s, as according to Sigmund Freud, was developed and could be analyzed by his relationship between public and private life, today we would find ourselves in front of an expansion of what used to be the limits of these two worlds. The phenomenon of Facebook is one of the many evident symptoms of this new way of personal communication, of the construction of identity live that permits a re-conquest of various layers of a past identity through regaining past acquaintances forgotten at the end of our adolescence without further communication if not that of chat.

In the writings of Zigmunt Bauman, from the end of the 90's the individual finds himself in contact with everything and everybody but is present nowhere and so ends up losing himself in everything. Taking action on this actual situation, *What is my name?* is a reflection on who we are as a result of what we communicate. The object is not an analysis nor a critique of the codes or of the ways en vogue that the individual citizen uses to charge and execute the false securities of complete control (that then confines itself to monitoring) of the events of the world. The object is to evoke and react through the need that man has always had to narrate, to listen and to have answers to understand better his personal and therefore collective identity. For this reason, each intervention plays on writing, on the relationship between words and their meaning, on the questions of who writes to whom and why, on putting attention to the presence of the other "different from oneself" and on the capacity to imagine and dream and not only to record.

HISK in this way is not a space that exhibits objects to observe passively, but it becomes a place of relationships between the people that pass through each time. This condition is aimed at making us think about what we intend by a work of art and by everyday experience and therefore also makes us question the current role of the artist and for what motives he realizes a show.

The yellow blob of Nedko Solakov painted in half on a wall with next to it written "I ordered this yellow blob from the exhibition assistant but later on I completely forgot the reason for this"; the postcards sent by Dan Rees with a double address that forces the postman to choose to deliver them to the show or to other neighboring houses; the folded pages inside different frames that create a perfect line by Nina Beier and Marie Lund perhaps revealed only afterwards to be political protest posters of the 70's; the light drawing of Mario Airò projected at the entrance, its composition taken from drawings in the desert of Nazca seen only from the sky (messages to whom?); the film of Mario Garcia Torres in which any spectator mimics and synthesizes in one minute a possible film narration; Jonathan Monk's performance with a children's choir that sings the results of a soccer game discussed the last week in Belgium; the sound installation of Rossella Biscotti broadcasts the words We will be here forever, forever and ever and ever and ever, do you understand that? forever ... for 50 minutes in continuation performed by a American rapper in Holland; these are only a few works of this project that render concrete and direct the concepts and the perplexities in question. In addition, these interventions demonstrate that the artist does not impose himself as one with truth in his pocket, but rather as the spectator as one that questions the world and the reflections on who we are and our identity.

These and other interventions, presences and possible narrations create in the visitor a condition of doubt of that which he sees by reevaluating his usual ways of interpreting signs and his perception of things, and thus stimulating an epiphany-like approach.

The idea of discovering our presence in the world, personal and collective, is that which these artists of different generations and backgrounds share in common and display their attitude on a conceptual matrix whose tautological or nominal dimension becomes contaminated by a romantic dimension of suggestion and evocation of the possible.

For this reason, in their context at HISK, there will be 5 images that are in confrontation and in continuity with artists of generations previous to them: the work by Jirí Kovanda from November 1976 “waiting for someone to call me ...”, the two clocks that tell time in synchrony titled Perfect Lovers by Felix González-Torres, the action photo from Secret Events realized during the second half of the 80’s in which James Lee Byars is showing a gold sphere against the sky while hiding his gaze from the camera, the photographic sequence of action writing on water by Maurizio Nannucci from 1973 and the installation “I’m too sad to tell you” a film of Bas Jan Ader from 1971. These works allow further reflection on the idea of gesture and on the attempt in the 70s to eliminate the distance between the space of life and that of art. Perhaps today this intent appears to us all so ingenuous and yet appears to us so feasible the possibility to mix the cards between two worlds for more concreteness and for the possibility of a shared view and reflection on the real and on our presence.

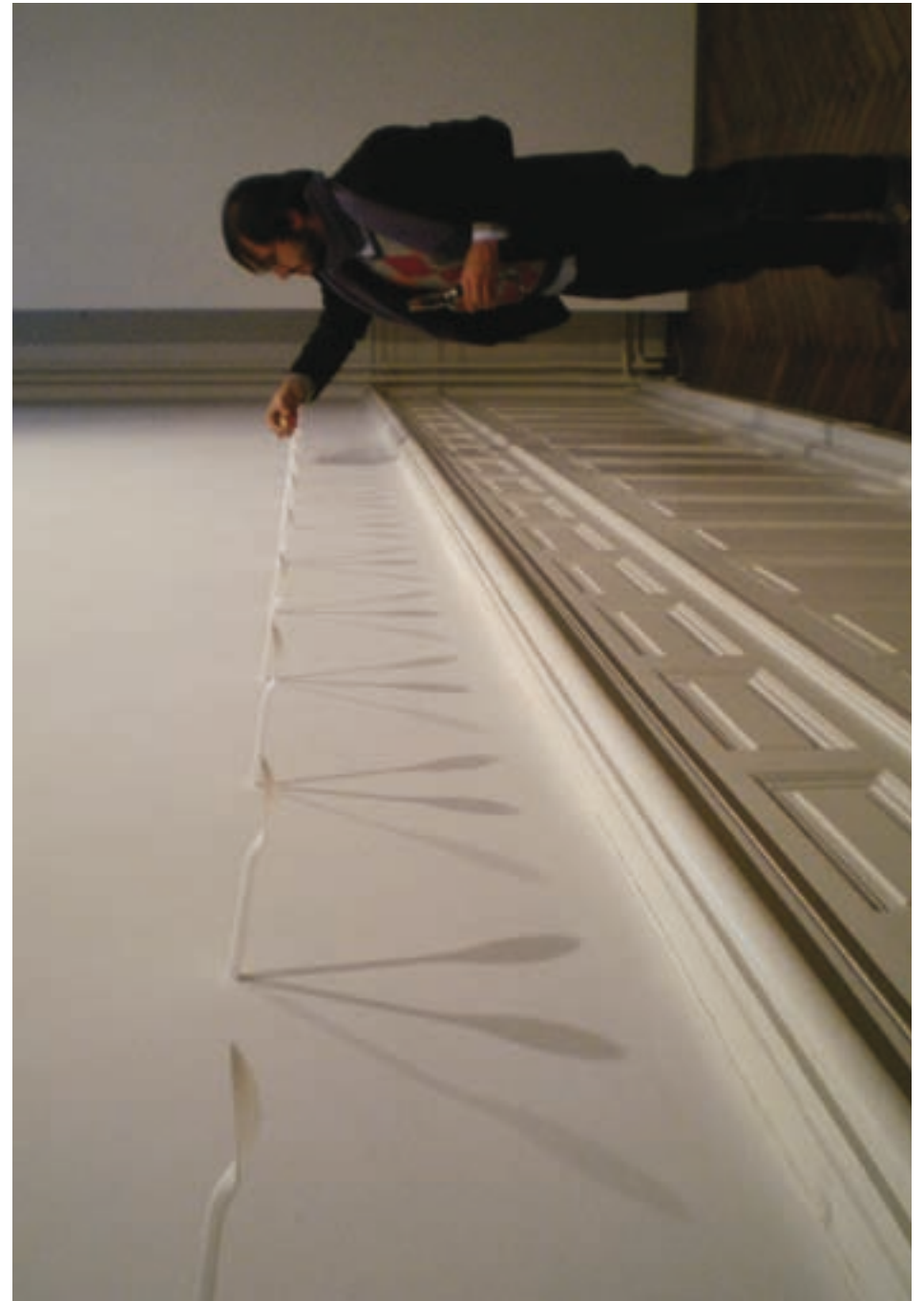


Works by (from L to R): Nina Beier & Marie Lund, Maurizio Nannucci, James Lee Byars



I'm To Sad To Tell You, 1971
Video

#2



Untitled, 2006
Spoons with tiny holes, filled with vodka

#2



Untitled (Perfect Lovers), 1991
Two clocks that show the time synchronised

#2



Untitled (Secret Event), last half of the 80's
Photograph

#2



Writing on water, 1973
30 photographs that document this action of the artist

#2



Mirage Fireplace, 2008
Mirrors with the exact measurements of the fireplace
in the exhibitionspace of HISK



Le Voci del Mondo, 2003
Book, wood, microlamp, brass (21 x 13 x 24cm)

#2



Meeting #119 (Saint Bavo Cathedral in front of the Van Eych altar piece. Februari 4th 1968 at Noon), 2008
Vinyl letters in varied sizes

- | | |
|---|--|
| a. close your eyes | e. and go 98 cm to the down sight direction without leave your pen ats |
| b. make a point with a pen somewhere at the exhibition space | f. and go 50 cm to the left direction without leave your pen ats |
| c. and go 75cm to the right direction without leave your pen at the surface | g. and go 23 cm to the up sight direction without leave your pen ats |
| d. and go 20 cm to the up sight direction without leave your pen ats | h. open your eyes |
| | i. try to figure out, you are back to a point |

Drawing for Lorenzo, 2005-2008
Instructions to make a drawing



Untitled (thinking about the lines of the Nazca desert), 2003-2008
Light projection on the floor



Keep Your Art And Sweet, You Might Have To Eat It, 2005
Cake, eaten on the opening



Tableaux Vivants, 2007
Video of a terrorist act against the museum of Madre
in Naples on the occasion of his solo show



Yellow Blob Story, 2008
Writing on the wall, varied dimensions



Pussa Via Bush, 2008
Neon writing - waiting for the American elections
and the ending of the mandate period of Bush



One Minute to Act a Title: Kim Jong II Favorite Movies, 2005
16mm film projection

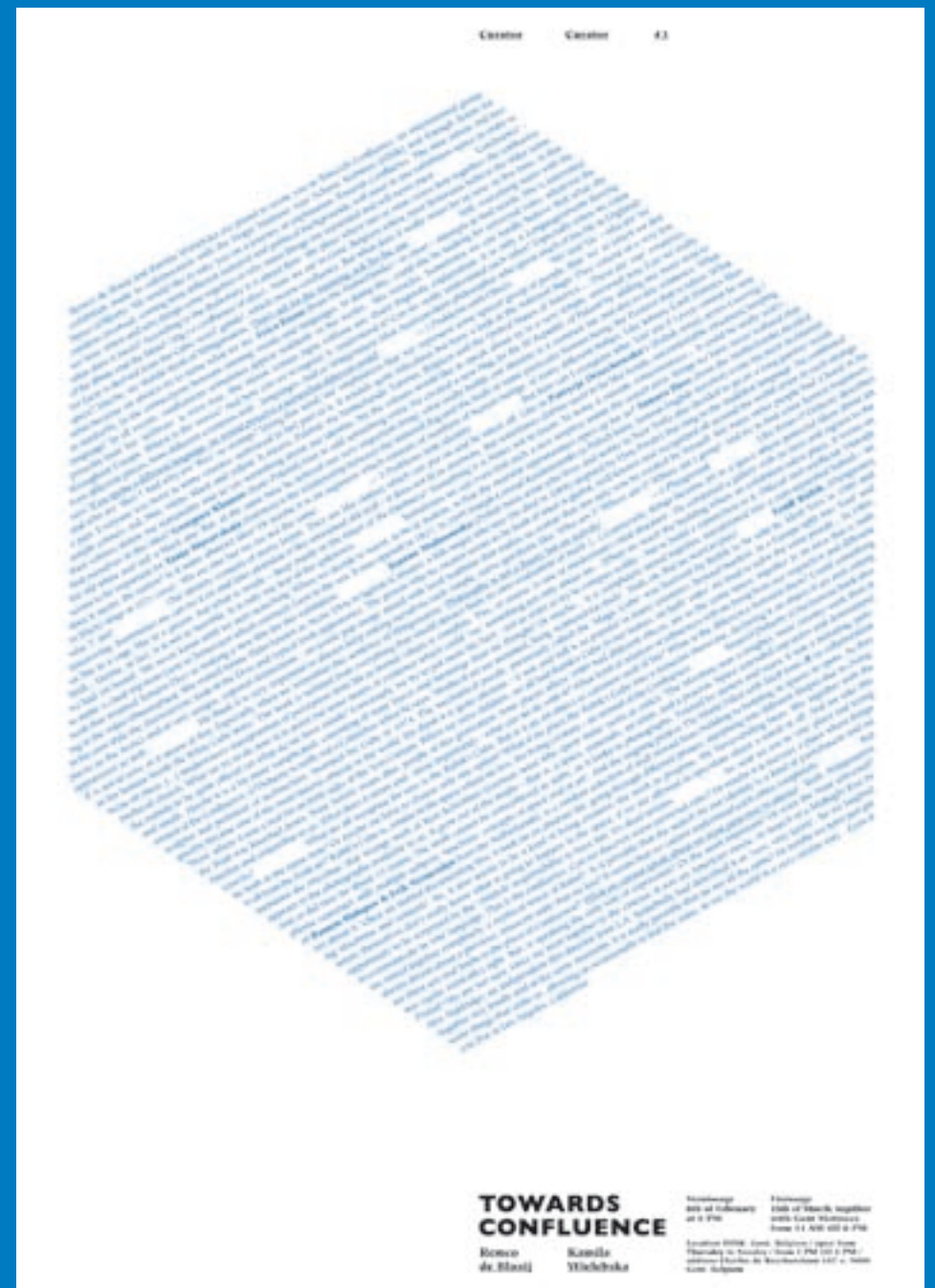


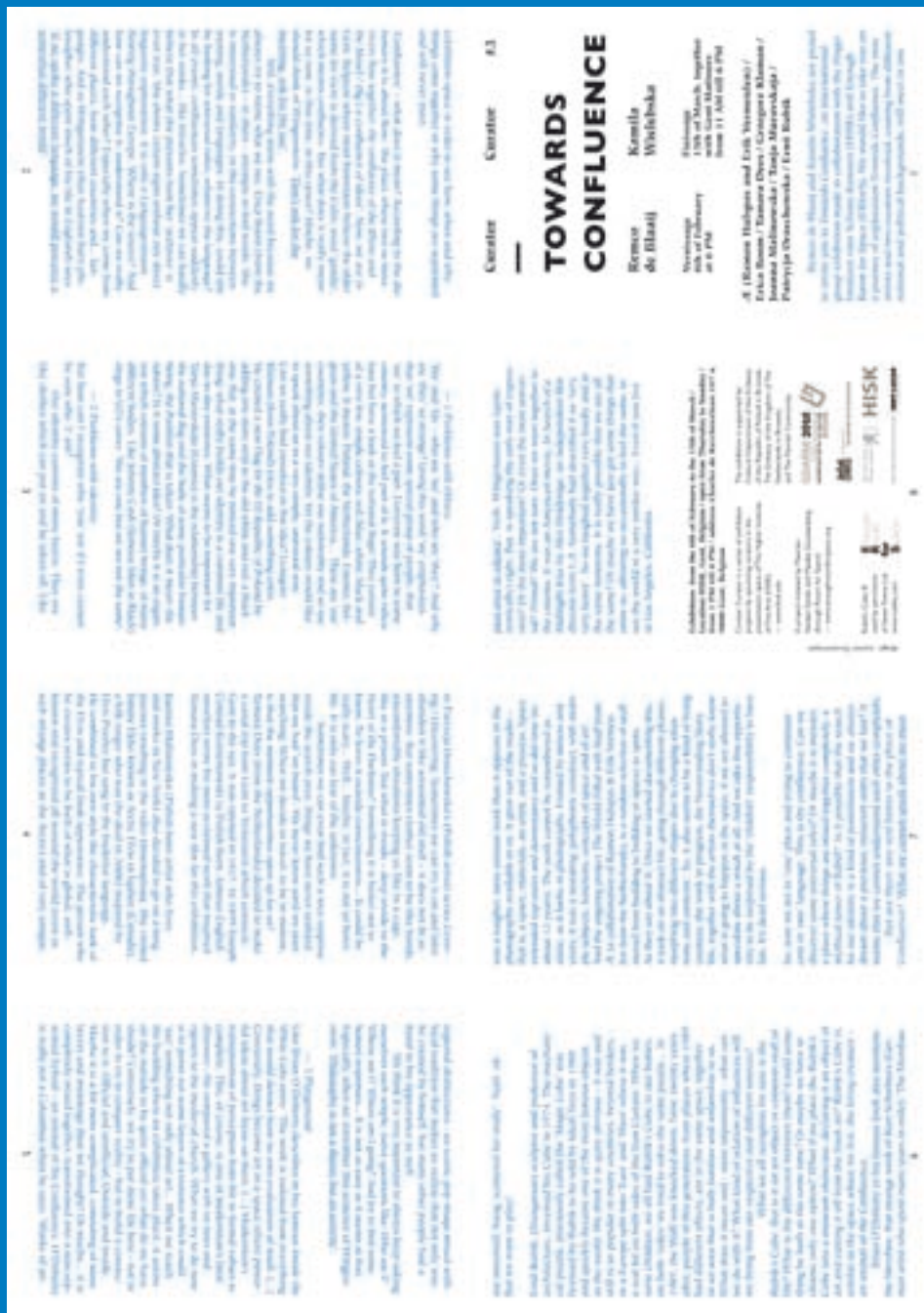
Untitled
(*I thought about going somewhere else ... but where?*), 2007
Five science fiction book covers of free interpretation

Exhibition View



Works by (from L to R): Dan Rees, Bas Jan Ader, James Lee Byars, Rosella Biscotti, Simone Berti





TOWARDS CONFLUENCE

Towards Confluence was an international group exhibition curated by Remco de Blaaij and Kamila Wieleska and presented in the exhibition space of The Higher Institute of Fine Arts from 6 February to 15 March 2009. The nine artists, Erica Boom, Tamara Dees, Grzegorz Klamon, Joanna Malinowska, Tanja Muravskaja, Patrycja Orzechowska, Ernő Rubik and ÆLot (Ramon Hulspas & Erik Vermeulen), and two curators, all coming from different national and political backgrounds, met in one exhibition space in order to see how, when and why things come together or why some things are separated and will never meet. We would like to take you on a journey of exploration *Towards Confluence*.

'Confluence' – what does it mean? According to the dictionary it is 'the place where two or more rivers flow together: *the confluence of the Rhine and the Mosel* / (fig.) *a confluence of ideas*.' Now we are in Ghent, Belgium where most historians believe the older name for Ghent is derived from the Celtic word 'ganda', which means *confluence*. But what does it really mean for us today, in this time, in this space? Maybe, we should look to Wittgenstein: **'Don't ask for the meaning, ask for the use.'**

Still, everything starts with the word because we always try to name what we see. Erica Boom (from the Netherlands) – in short – attempts to find words in a large-scale drawing that uses graphic icons existing in our linguistic and visual memory. She is interested in similarity, in the connections between naming, words and languages. In doing this, could she be looking for universal rules, whatever the language? Confluences appear suddenly in her works ... like miracles. She shows certain signs without any direct linguistic explanation. It is only a *Languagestream* flowing throughout Europe. Where is the source? And how can we recognize it, understand it? Can we really understand each other? Especially when we come from different places, from different countries and languages. And as Wittgenstein said, **'If we spoke a different language, we would perceive a somewhat different world.'**

PROBLEMS WITH OTHERS

'We' and 'Us' – who are 'we' and who are 'they'? And why are 'they' so strange? Using this word 'we' emphasises that 'we' represent some special group of people, that 'we' in which we feel a part. Everyone was born in some country, sentenced to feel part of it. It sounds quite ridiculous but have a look at the national flags! They consist of a very few, simple colours: red, blue, white, black, yellow and green. It means: Poland, the Netherlands, Estonia, Belgium, Hungary and the United States of America ... These are 'our' countries, their colours define our nationality and so say something about our identity. Yet the colours would like to speak about us in a very simple, universal way. Can we really find ourselves in this idea? Grzegorz Klamon (from Poland) tries to add something extra. He created a new *Flag for the III Republic of Poland* by adding one more strip to the old white and red: a black one. But, at the same time he noticed one very important thing: what really

builds our identity is a common life and day-to-day existence. What seems to be important for Tanja Muravskaja (Estonia) is the relationship between the national flag and the body of some particular human being, the *Position* that is taken. What does it mean: the nation? Is it some abstract idea? Or maybe it is an organism which consists of numbers of human beings, of many different bodies. Like Johnny Cash (famous Man in Black) sings in U2's cover: 'We are one but we are not the same.'

PROBLEMS WITH IDENTITY But how can I recognize who 'you' are if I cannot be sure who 'I' am? Our identity consists of many layers and acts like clothes which can be put on and taken off, like in Patrycja Orzechowska's (Poland) series *Uncovering / Covering*. Sometimes we can try an identity on and later abandon it like unwanted old stuff – it does not fit us anymore. But sometimes clothes, like identities, can feel like bonds, as if keeping us caged, or imprisoned in a way. It begs the question, what is inside, deep inside the *Heart of Darkness*? Are we best to leave it unknown and outside our consciousness? It could be really scary ... Or maybe, it is not so frightening after all. Perhaps all that is in play is our fear of the unknown.

Sometimes we can even find a nice surprise inside the search area, things we have never realised that we had 'on board.' We will never know until we start searching. When we decide to travel, to be active in our exploration, is that the moment opportunities open up for us? Tamara Dees (The Netherlands) decided to make a canal trip from Ghent to Terneuzen, which is a journey that has connected Ghent to the sea since 1827. In 1899 Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski (a Polish-born, famous English novelist) wrote his most acclaimed work, *Heart of Darkness*, that inspired Tamara Dees to make a new film, *Tor Magnolia*, for this exhibition.

Joanna Malinowska (Polish-born artist who lives and works in New York) also decided to go on a long journey resulting in the video *Umanaqtuaq*. She visited Jimmy Ekho, who is known as Arctic Elvis in Iqaluit, Canada, and who was a folk singer (he died in 2008) inspired by Elvis Presley but sang in the Inuktitut language. He creatively combined the characteristic look of Elvis and the typical Inuk appearance. The person he created seems to be built of what is global, well known and recognised all around the world (even in such strange places as the Arctic) as well as of very unique, regional distinctions. He encompassed an iconic Pop image mixed with a local tradition that makes us realise that not only was he created by his own volition, but many other people had a hand in his appearance as well.

PLAYGROUND Brian O'Doherty wrote, in his famous *Inside the White Cube*, 'The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. [...] Conversely, things become art in a space where powerful ideas about art focus on them. [...] Modernism's transposition of perception from life to formal values is complete. This, of course, is one of modernism's fatal diseases.' He compared a gallery

with its laws and rigours to the medieval church. When we reach a building where an exhibition takes place, it tends to seem, from the outside, to be quite official. Yet what shelters inside? Not necessarily an attempt to try to conquer reality, but attempts to build connections to it. Outside and inside. Official and unofficial. Maybe, in practice, it's all a bit more complicated, consisting of more layers and meanings than we thought. Maybe the situation ought to be seen as a mixture, transformed into a non-separated hybrid, an animal of the Confluence. O'Doherty is not a Columbus when he writes that 'Works of art are mounted, hung, scattered for study.' Yeah, OK, but we want to play!

In the centre of the exhibition was the work of Ernő Rubik (Hungarian), a sculptor and professor of architecture, and the inventor of the Rubik's Cube in 1974. The mechanical puzzle, originally named the Magic Cube, was licensed by Rubik to be sold by Ideal Toys in 1980 and it quickly became one of the most famous objects in the world. It was, and still is, very popular in many countries. Its popularity extends beyond borders, even in a Europe split into 'East' and 'West', even throughout the generations living on either side of the Iron Curtain. As children, many of us had a Rubik's Cube in our homes. On both sides of the Eastern and Western borders we tried to solve the same puzzle.

In 1989, the Berlin Wall was knocked down. Now, twenty years later, people of this generation, from places where 1989 had different consequences, are in the same space, together in an area that is both familiar and unfamiliar to us. What does it mean and – more importantly – what can we do with it? What kind of relation of influences will we bring from our respective and different sources? What we all recognise, for sure, is the Rubik's Cube. But is it an art object or a piece among the common stuff of life? What is the difference between them? Could something be both at the same time? What if we place the Rubik's Cube into a museum showcase, declaring it an object of art and cut it off from fresh air? Rubik's Cube is, similar to the space where we live, the living creature – an animal of the Confluence.

Brian O'Doherty, in his famous book, also mentions the *Merzbau*. It is a strange piece of work by Kurt Schwitters (a German artist who spent many years in exile): 'The *Merzbau* was a tougher, more sinister work than it appears in the photographs available to us. It grew out of the studio – that is, a space, materials, an artist, and a process. Space extended (up-stairs and downstairs) and so did time (to about thirteen years). The work cannot be remembered as static, as it looks in photographs. Framed by meters and years, it was a mutating, polyphonic construct, with multiple subjects, functions, concepts of space and of art.' The ongoing project, *The World Filled with Stuff* by Æ (a collaboration of Ramon Hulpas & Erik Vermeulen from the Netherlands), is a random selection of stuff moved from building to building or spaces to spots. As they say about it: 'Once we started documenting this, it took on an abstract life, going through

different phases, morphing into different shapes due to changing situations and contexts.' Their process seems to be a kind of living creature too, a work in progress or a never-ending story. Are there any real limits in the place of confluence? **'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.'** Yeah, Wittgenstein was (quite ironically) right but is speaking the only form of expression? Or the most important? Or even the most universal? Primal? We are not sure. Once we went together to the cinema to watch the American film *In Search of a Midnight Kiss* by Alex Holdridge (an independent film director from L.A.). Somebody described it as 'very, very funny.' And we laughed loudly together – at the same moments no less! Is it really possible that we are all the same? Or maybe there are just a few things that unite us, allowing us occasionally to feel the same, to see the world in a very similar way ... Even if you live in Los Angeles, California.

Remco de Blaaij & Kamila Wielebska

CURATOR AND CURATOR ASK EACH OTHER SOME QUESTIONS

Kamila: What is the most important for you in Towards Confluence? Certain ideas? Objects? Anything else?

Remco: I think several aspects are important. If it was only one, I would seriously doubt the whole idea of confluence. The title, *Towards Confluence*, can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, 'Towards' is understood as the idea of heading towards new ideas. 'Confluence', on the other hand, is the very point where ideas merge together. This phenomenon is very interesting to research at different levels. In our case we made an exhibition about that moment, so to speak, but we also invited people that we thought connected in terms of their work or attitude with the idea of confluence. Our approach was quite straightforward in that sense, and simple. Neither the objects, nor the exhibition is important in itself, but it helps me, and hopefully others, to understand confluence through the lens of the possibilities that art provides. Inviting artists, and working collaboratively on a foundation of shared interests, is one of the main factors that spark curiosity and demonstrate the potential of public space. It's an important opportunity to discover how and where new knowledge can reach out. In our job public space and responsibility for it are vital basic ingredients and feeders of our thoughts and actions.

It's an endeavour that makes us worry how and when to act when putting information and knowledge out on stage – a stage that is, to me, highly collaborative. The individual input belongs to the artist, writer, or curator but it does not attract the limelight per se. Rather, the knowledge and experiences that we are willing to share contribute to this public space, this stage. That stage/public space is the only place that can offer us full access to the exchange of knowledge and if it takes place in public, another layer is added. Putting something on display is in that sense quite a useless effort if we don't know why it is done or how to access our own imagination through it. Together with the mutual exchange of knowledge, imagination stays one of the key elements to consider, especially when you search for a moment where supposedly different interpretations meet and come together.

K: Can we really understand each other?

R: The question of confluence is a highly general one to ask, as you can talk about two rivers meeting and flowing together, but also about different national identities that come together in one person. We specifically reached out to understand that level of identity construction. This is something we could relate to due to our own experiences coming from Eastern and Western zones in Europe, and from the same era. Understanding each other begins, as many immigration policies would agree, with language. A language does not necessarily need to

be a national one, as long as there is some way of communicating; a visual language is definitely part of that, too.

In contemporary society a lot of people experience an enormous loss in the processes of translation when theory becomes practice in their own backyard. Immigration and its consequences in European contexts are probably a good example of that 'loss' and has attracted a lot of attention for the last fifty years in almost every discipline. We saw the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall built and removed and a growing need for a stable European political and social situation. Excluding and including that what is beyond the national borders was and still is, connected to this history. It's unclear why specific moments of this sense of uncertainty occur, and why it seems that necessary tools in effectively dealing with them are just not there. Rather than talk about the necessity of the political realm and analyse its possibilities, I would strongly argue for the need of artistic processes as a contribution to understand uncertainties surrounding notions of immigration and evolving identities. A political response ought not be the only response. Maybe art can provide instruments to bridge the gaps in society and offer imaginable possibilities to consider these changes in our times. The results of globalization in that sense are, of course, very interesting to follow and artistic processes recognise that. Where globalisation reaches out in a common understanding of the word, there are always

individual and complex cases that don't comply with a mainstream understanding. Those cases need to be researched in order to understand a bit of why we came up with global solutions that affect society. When we look more closely at the phenomena of mass immigration and the present-day mobility of people, identity and nationalism are aspects that strongly relate. Sovereign borders within Europe may be more permeable but they are also no longer the only means to encounter that which lies on 'the other side'. Physical borders now exist in tandem with virtual ones. A virtuality that can be accessed through the imagination and can be put back into reality by means of art could become a very useful tool to understand each other. It might even be the only tool that is still left.

R: If you were to describe the notion of going towards something, the act of approaching, how do you see that implemented in your own practice?

K: The notion of approaching is quite important to me, not only in art. I understand 'going towards something' as a kind of process which is necessary when we would like to achieve something, to understand something, to move our way of thinking into another dimension – in other words, for me this is a primary process for every activity. The basis for 'going towards something' is to be open to changes. It sounds simple but, in practice, it is quite hard. Actually, this is a kind of experiment hinging on the magical

sentence: 'let the energy flow.' This is a ubiquitous rule ... If you ask me about my own practice, my work, I would like to mention two sorts of activity I deal with. Writing, especially writing about art, is one of the most important things in my life. I always try to treat it as an experiment, not to be afraid of testing new things but to be open to changes. I can say that writing, for me, is a kind of never-ending story. But it doesn't mean that something like 'the perfect text' exists. Each time I try to write the best text for this particular moment. Life is changing so the texts should follow the flow.

The other area, organising art exhibitions is more complicated because it entails working with other people. I am a freelance curator so I am not connected with one single institution. I think we can call this attitude a kind of experiment too. When you freelance you should be especially open to changes as well as to the hesitation and uncertainty in various meanings. So I drift from one place to another in order to spread certain ideas, energy and ask a few questions. Like a medieval minstrel ...

R: We saw in the Rubik's Cube that various elements can combine together. Play, a sophisticated design and even 'social thoughts' can merge into a product ready for a large audience. Do you think that this invention of the Rubik's Cube, and the way it conquered the world, could be a blueprint for the much-demanded need for audiences in contemporary curatorial practices?

And can we still speak of the West and East?

K: I think that the Rubik's Cube is a unique phenomenon. Very complex and simple at the same time. The Rubik's Cube is like a poem. And it is quite impossible to turn a poem into a law, make a rule from it. But, of course, we can be inspired by it ... I think that the West and East (despite the fact that the Rubik's Cube and many other things spread everywhere) are still here. I see two main reasons. First, we (in Eastern Europe) still don't feel that our reality has become 'fully Western.' Try to imagine the situation: we have been waiting for the West to come so long and now we are a bit disappointed. This is the West? Maybe not yet? Or maybe the West has always only existed in the dreams of Eastern people? Another thing is our experience, our memory, the burden, or as we say in Polish, our 'luggage'. We should speak of the West and East until the last person born before 1989 has died.

R: Regarding the forming of identities, as we saw it in almost all of the works shown during *Towards Confluence*, what is the crucial discovery for you?

K: Maybe I would not call it a discovery but it was a rather good opportunity to draw our attention to the multiple layers that our identity consists of while we were in the process of writing curatorial text before the exhibition. We tried, together with the artists, to build a construction based on these premises in the gallery space – not homogeneous but revealing

different layers simultaneously. Thus, this construction could be seen from numerous points of view. We also planned to spend time with all the artists, before the opening, and it happened. Almost all of them were there in HISK and I think that this 'international meeting' was really an invaluable part of our activity as curators.

R: How do you think those elements of play can or should be part of what you are doing?

K: In my work I would like, with the help of the element of play, to provoke the situations of interaction with other people and thereby to involve them in something that is, in my opinion, meaningful or valuable. The way to use the elements of play depends, of course, on a particular situation. I believe that art is a good 'place' to start interacting with people, because in contact with art they are usually more open than in other, everyday life situations. That is why so often people try to seduce each other in art galleries!

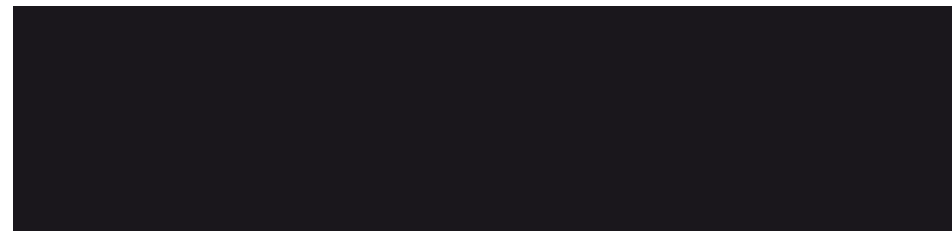
R: What is your experience of working in another country?

K: Everything depends on the people and not the territory lying within given borders. There are certain stereotypes that, in fact, sometimes work. I have worked on three exhibitions so far and each of them encompasses a completely different story, a different place, different people, different problems, ideas, indoor and outdoor locations. So every time I felt like a foreigner in a way, like I was doing an experiment. I think this time it was quite

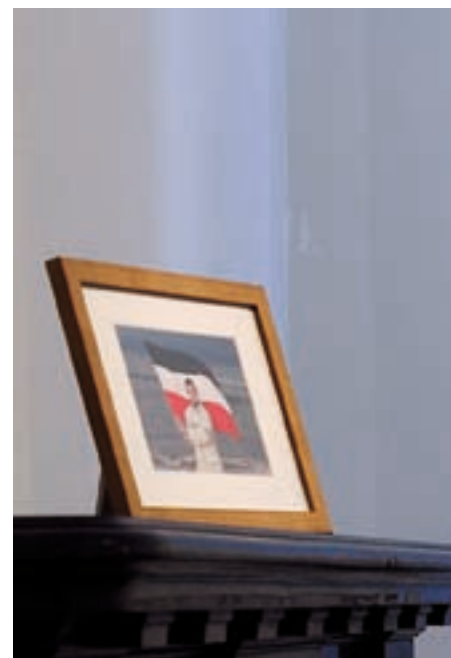
natural to compare 'Western' and 'Eastern' people in many 'un-touristic' situations, and I have made a lot of observations in this context. It could be really hard to tell you about them in only a few words. Some things are, of course, universal and appear under every sky.

Final Note

The above text was written over a year ago. It's fair to say that we would have probably done it differently under today's circumstances. We would change some words and we have deleted some of our analyses that do not make any sense anymore. It makes clear once again that the point of a merge, the moment of confluence, is definitely a shifting point. A point that does not represent a static and physical border, but is undergoing continuous and flexible changes. However, we would never had the opportunity to experience these changes and flexibility if we did not write and reflect on it in written, linguistic terms and by producing an exhibition. This publication itself functions as a point of confluence, hopefully providing a useful tool to keep progressing towards imaginative understandings and attitudes that help us navigate through our practical lives.



Grzegorz Klaman, *Wedding of the Black Flag with Baltic Sea*, 2002



Grzegorz Klaman, *Flag for the III Republic of Poland*, 2001





#3



Grzegorz Klamon *The Internal Flag*, 2001



#3

Exhibition View (from L to R): Ernő Rubik, Tamara Dees, Erica Boom



Erica Boom, *Languagestream*, 2009
Ernő Rubik, *Rubik's Cube*, 1974



Ernő Rubik, *Rubik's Cube*, 1974

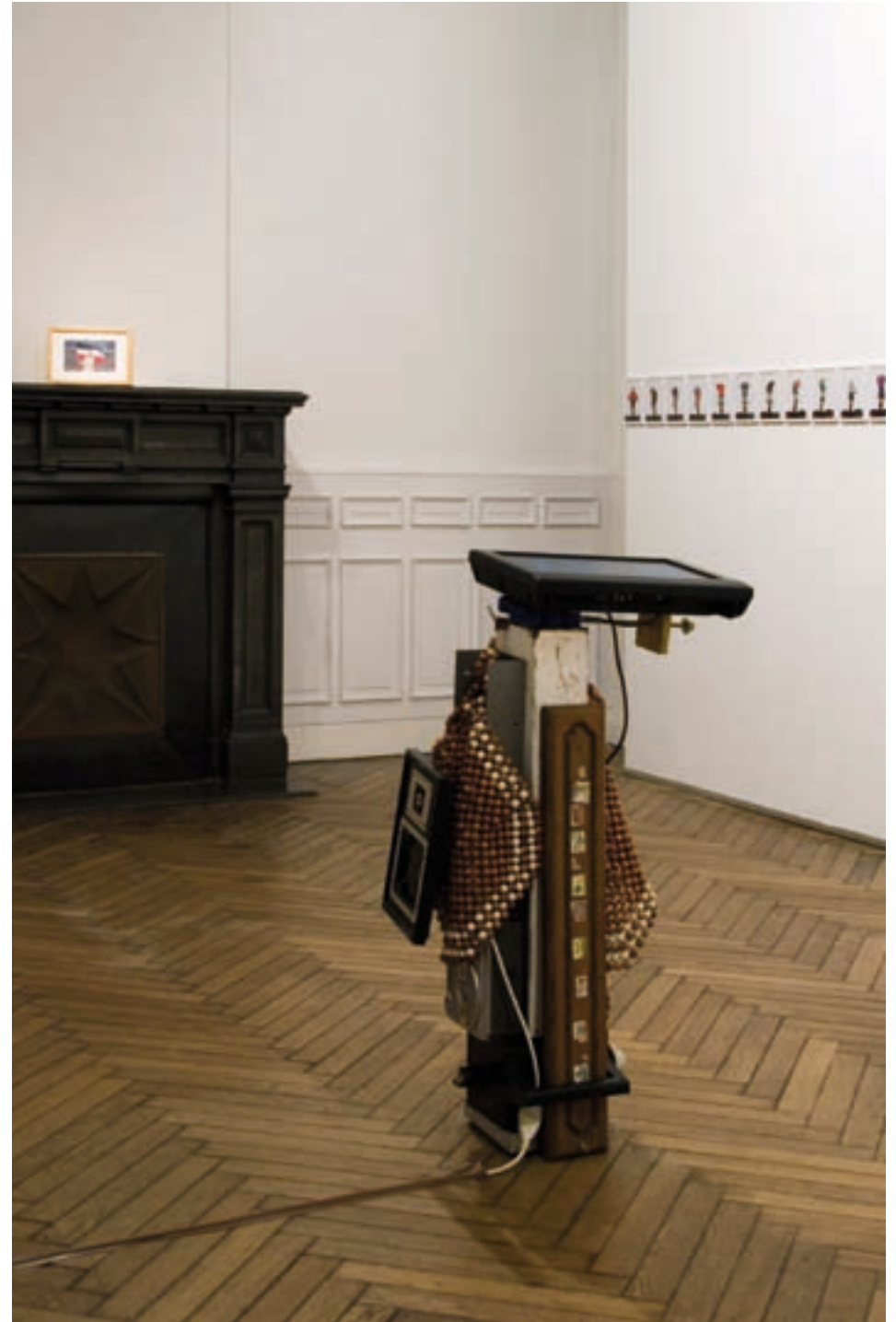


Æ - Ramon Hulspas & Erik Vermeulen, *The World Filled with Stuff* (installation Nr. 5), 2005
Ongoing project



#3

Æ - Ramon Hulspas & Erik Vermeulen, *The World Filled with Stuff* (installation Nr. 5), 2005
Ongoing project



#3





TIME-CHALLENGER

an exhibition about critical reconstruction

GÖKÇEN CABADAN — ANDRÉ GAGNAG — ASLI CAVUSOĞLU — OLOF DREIJER
 FELIX GMELIN — LAUREN VON GÖTT — ROMEO GONGORA — SUSANNE KRIEMANN
 MAKODE LINDE — CHRISMOPOULOS PANAYIOTOU — RINJIS VAN DE VELDE
 VIRON VERT AND A VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH ULUS BAKER BY ARAS OZGUN

CURATED BY ADNAN YILDIZ

TIME AS A GOOD TEACHER AND A BIG CHALLENGE

Adnan Yildiz

PROLOGUE

I always had a good relationship with time. During my childhood and adolescent years I had no control over it, but I remember that I enjoyed looking at the clocks and watches that I saw in the showrooms while my parents were shopping. During my years as a Bachelor student, my campus had a building with a big clock, and my fellow students and I were too young to take care of ourselves. We bit each other. Time was the only witness.

Immanuel Kant, Virginia Woolf, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Marcel Proust, and Paul Virilio are my ghost-friends who gave me reason to reflect on the conception of time, and they all influenced a balance in me. Consequently, I started to organise my time, deal with it and manage its schedule.



Exhibition view

Currently, I am a freelance curator based in Berlin. Presently, I find that we all share a reality of global transformation and environmental changes. The first dominated us so much that it shadowed our ability to understand the significance of the latter. And here in Berlin, it can be slow.

Maaiké & Maarten's invitation to me to write for the publication covering the Curator Curator projects triggered some critical questions, which inspired the thought of how we remember the exhibitions after they have ended, and how they continue to influence our artistic knowledge and curatorial grammar. I have no answer to this question, but I do have a proposal, a post scriptum (that was sent as an email to its participants at the end), and ten images.

THE PROPOSAL

Time-Challenger

Time-Challenger was an exhibition proposal drawn up for the open call of the Curator Curator project, which is a collaborative project between Enough Room for Space from

Rotterdam, and HISK, a post-graduate programme currently located in Ghent. The original proposal was based on the idea of opening a space-time for a discussion of how artistic reconstruction has been operating today through diverse conceptual approaches and contextual references in relation to current image politics. Recently, there have been numerous exhibition projects addressing artistic re-enactments, remakes, reproductions, and reinterpretation. Time-Challenger took into consideration the art historical and analytical framework of these projects while taking a different direction by connecting the discussion to Antonio Negri's concept of the 'reconstruction of hope.' Just after the proposal was selected by Enough Room for Space, I did a research visit to the exhibition space and engaged in discussions with the residents of the studios, and post-graduate students, during the Open Studio Week. The proposal was crystallised by these discussions and by aspects of the artistic production at HISK, and then turned into an exhibition about critical reconstruction. The term 'critical reconstruction' is borrowed from Gary Wolf (Venture Kapital, Wired Magazine, 1998) who writes about the reconstruction of Berlin following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Coincidentally, or perhaps as a sign of Zeitgeist, this proposal was completed in Berlin's Kreuzberg neighbourhood, the site of much of the most dynamic reconstruction in Berlin since 1989.



Exhibition view

In *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005), Marina Abramovic acts out select historical performance art works from 1970's artists (such as Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys etc.,) including two of her own. The series of performances at the Guggenheim Museum in New York sharpened the tendency

for questioning the timing of re-enactments, remakes and reinterpretations etc., in the art world. In an interview in the New York Times in early November 2005, Abramovic explained the impetus for her most recent performances, stating that she felt 'a strong need to preserve the memory

of performances that influenced [her] as an artist. There's nobody to keep the history straight ... I feel almost, like, obliged. I felt like I have this function to do it.' And this sense of duty only grew stronger when she began to see ideas behind many important performances that were borrowed with no credit given, or appropriated in advertisements and fashion.



Exhibition view

Many artists today have been using similar approaches and strategies for reinterpreting art history as well as transforming world history and culture. Rather than framing the discussion as a form of artistic production through an art historical perspective, Time-Challenger aims to deal with the timing

of these productions to relate these tendencies to the repositioning of contemporary politics, image culture and digital-visual capital. As an exhibition about critical reconstruction, Time-Challenger reformulated the critique as an open-ended process of personalising the situation and performing a synthesis of many perspectives. To make things public, there always needs to be a personal position. The process of making things public in contemporary art practice not only brings together art works but also makes dialogues visible in order to create a physical experience for potential interactions.

To deal with the monstrous experience of global capital, Antonio Negri proposes the term 'reconstruction of hope' in his *Time for Revolution* (2005): 'How can a revolutionary subjectivity form itself within the multitude of producers? How can this multitude make a decision of resistance and rebellion? How can it develop a strategy of re-appropriation? How can the multitude lead a struggle for the self-government of itself?' He responds to these questions through reconstructing hope: 'In the biopolitical postmodern, in this phase that sees the transformation and productive enrichment of labour-power, but on the other hand sees the capitalist exploitation of society as a whole, we thus pose these questions. As for the answers, I certainly do not possess

them. But ... probably a few bricks toward the reconstruction of hope (or better, as in *Alma Venus*, dystopia) have been laid.' Time-Challenger shared a common conceptual ground with the exhibition project *There is no Audience*, an exhibition about public imagination (22.05.09-30.08.09, Montehermoso, Spain) and focused on the same terms but on a different level.* Time-Challenger however, emphasised the possibility of reformulating the discussion of artistic reconstruction in relation to the political atmosphere of our time and integrating the strategy of reconstructing hope into the process.

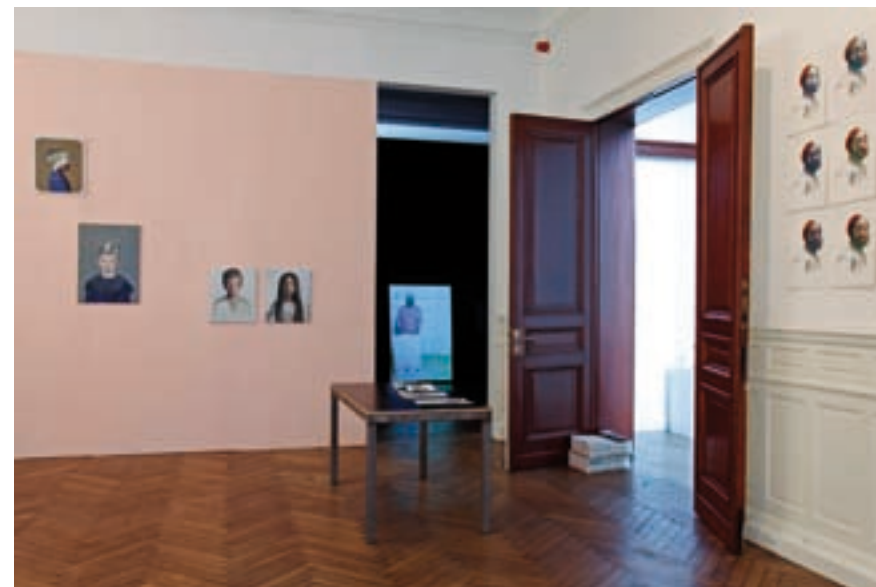


Exhibition view

Through rethinking modernism, Time-Challenger displayed some artistic reconstructions that challenged pre-given definitions and realities of our past and present time – by relating the problematic of timing. In the exhibition, Gökçen Cabadan displayed paintings that depict con-

temporary visions of family, and health, and transform the ready-made images at an abstract level of reconstructive criticality. Developing a conceptual identity and an expressive quality, Viron Vert's drawings and collages include elements of history and culture through personal memories and attachments. Ömer Ayhan ironically fictionalises a success story reflecting the power of the media over content via an evening news program. Romeo Gongora's *Prison* is composed of monologues from four prisoners and establishes a critical dialogue on society and models of justice (punitive/rehabilitative). By using a level of abstraction through ready-made images and painting, André Catalão's installation is a reflection of the artist's cultural memory. Olof Dreijer's sound installation is composed of animal sounds and provides a fictional space through reconstructing the perception of nature and the elements of evolution.

As an unforgettable gesture, Felix Gmelin's *Farbtest II, Die Rote Fahne, Colour Test II, The Red Flag* is composed from the original film shoot and the remake of Gerd Conradt's tracking shot of students running through the



Exhibition view

streets of West Berlin in 1968. Gmelin's father had been one of those waving the flag, and the two-channel video loop directly reflects on Negri's point. Lauren von Gogh conceptualizes a personal story, and reconstructs an everyday experience for the audience in order to create a social critique. Susanne Kriemann's publications presented on a table include different strategies of recontextualizing the form of images; they are unique examples of experiments on the format of publication and reading images. Makode Linde's silk screen prints stimulate a contemporary critique of the history of culture and identity: logos from global sport industry delicately installed into the illustrative portraits of African figures remind us of the exploitation of labour. Christodoulos Panayiotou works with archives and personal memories of sound and image, recreating new dimensions in the perceptive levels of the audience through his installation. Borrowing the images from the world of exploration and discovery (in this instance, National Geographic) Rinus Van de Velde performs his artistic research through his charcoal drawings. There was also a

* Like *Time-Challenger* the proposal for the exhibition *There Is No Audience* was also produced for an open call. That one was selected from 370 proposals, sent from 35 countries, for the Montehermoso 2009 Curator Grant.

video interview presented in the exhibition with Ulus Baker by Aras Özgün, *What is an opinion?*, that opens a channel to the audience regarding the social process behind the construction of any opinion.

This discussion was ultimately linked to the question: 'How does any form of artistic reconstruction develop a level of criticality through its production process, and how does this criticality embody a public challenge?' and placed within the framework of the exhibition. The exhibition, in turn, was designed on the basis of Paul Virilio's strategic methodology: 'Play at being a critic. Deconstruct the game in order to play with it. Instead of accepting the rules, challenge and modify them. Without the freedom to critique and reconstruct, there is no truly free game: we are addicts and nothing more.' (from the interview with Paul Virilio by Jérôme Sans).

by Adnan Yıldız



A tour by the curator (Adnan Yıldız) at the opening of *Time-Challenger*

#4



Gökçen Cabadan, *Dream of a Bastard*, 2009

EPILOGUE

“ Dear Participants,
Enough Room for Space
team, and HISK people,
and friends who have
been with us,

Hello from Berlin.

*I have been thinking about
writing a long email to all to
share my reflections about
the process. Several times
I tried to do it. However, the
time was never right. As you
might have noticed before,
Time-Challenger is going to
close down this Sunday and
we are going to keep the*

*promises and the visions of our collective work as long as
we are alive.*

*First of all, I am so grateful to all of the participating artists,
who allowed me to show their works in this context and the*



Makode Linde, *Untitled*, 2009



#4



Shot from the performance by Lauren van Gogh

HISK and Enough Room for Space team for their involvement and dedication. In such a short time and with a limited budget, we have manifested an exhibition through which we gained some experience of space-time in order to come close to our practice and questions.

To be honest, from the beginning, it was a challenge to deal with the schedule of the show. When I look back at the

process, there are several points that immediately occur to me. Through this exhibition, my interest and focus has shifted to the process of installation and the creative labour that we put into our work during the installation process. My further research will definitely focus on designing an exhibition/experience in order to reflect the cognitive and the collective process of the installation-making on the audience. The physicality of



Olof Dreijer & Mamori,
Commissioned by: Adnan Yıldız,
Producer: Montehermoso,
Cover: Viron Vert, Graphic Design:
Frank Jentner



time and space, the decision-making process during the installation days, and the adaptation of the works into a new context are now next stations for me.



Aslı Çavuşoğlu, *A Turkish Doctor*:
Ömer Ayhan, 2004

Ideas, projects, art works and exhibitions are of course significant in terms of stimulating a public discussion. After all, this is how we make things public. But this time the influence of creative 'labour' was very visible in the process. Thanks to Ian, Jiri, Isabel, Hans, Toni, Bert, Andre, Makode, Assaf, and some others (forgive my fish-like

memory) who were very supportive. Time-Challenger was made possible and I hope you also enjoyed the process of making that possibility into a reality.



Romeo Gongora, *Pardon*, 2007-'08



Rinus Van de Velde, *I Am So Sorry We Are Looking I Hope You Will Agree The Wait Has Been Worth It*, 2009

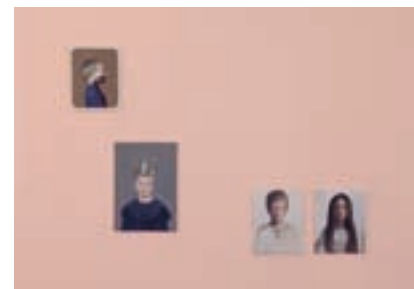
As a personal note, it was a very unique experience to hear the many things from many people that ultimately gave me confidence in my work. I am really happy not to have a consensus on the final form of the exhibition except for the fact that the installation was done to a professional standard. I didn't even take it personally when a drunk guy called me an asshole at the party. When some people, who really meant it, were telling me that there was energy in the air, I felt myself go invisible.

I believe that this exhibition

moved into another direction during its production process. Yes, it was a risk to loose connections with the original



Makode Linde, *Untitled*, 2009



Gökçen Cabadan, *We All Are Flesh And Blood / White Hierarchy*, 2009

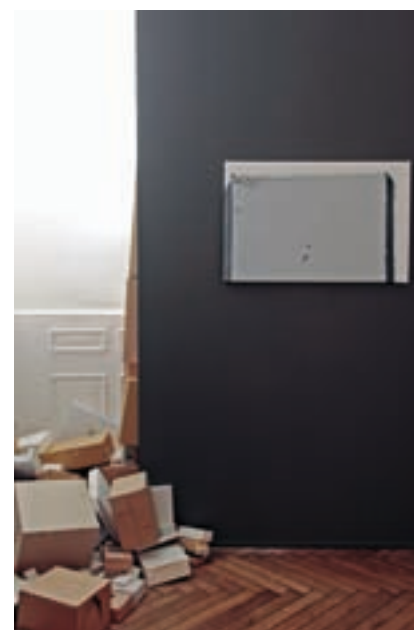
proposal, but this made it possible to trigger new questions within the context. There are several ways to make an exhibition, and I think this time I chose to work on the space and the context. Perhaps it was so, because I fell in love with the space from the very start.

We can only bring life to the institutions.

I remember a conversation between Zygmunt Bauman and Maaretta Jaukkuri, 'Thank God I am not a curator ... scapegoat ... the curator is in the front line of a big battle of meaning under conditions of uncertainty.' Art practice is based on the fundamental relationship between the artist and the audience. Nevertheless curating an increasingly problematic form of this or that sort of culture or management conflict. In accordance with the changing territories of my enquiry, which have transformed the role of the artist

and artistic/performative research as a form of knowledge into a discussion about the new audience, I agree with Bauman that, in a nutshell, curating is a dirty job. However, I still believe that we can create beautiful challenges for everyone.

And my basic motivation behind inviting three artists from the HISK context was to create a dialogue between the institutional framework and the discussion. And now I think that was the best decision. I wish we all would have spent more time together



André Catalão, *Beauty Cream Bar*, 2009

and had the chance to organise proper studio visits or discuss things in a different setting. But time is a challenge, too.

Finally, I would like to make a statement here. I feel that I did not choose or pick up anyone for this exhibition. Or let me say it like this: I think I am not interested in picking up anyone for anything. That happens by itself when you move onto questions. And there are more questions ... that don't require answers, but require new questions.

THANKS AGAIN for sharing your time with me.

Adnan Yıldız



Time-Challenger Afterparty

**AFTER ALL,
EVERYTHING IS
DIFFERENT
IN THE END**

**AFTER ALL,
EVERYTHING IS
DIFFERENT
IN THE END**

CURATOR CURATOR v.0
an exhibition at the MUSE
28 September – 18 October 2009
from Thursday to Sunday
from 14.00 to 18.00
Opening: 28 September 18.00
Curated by Jens Maier-Rothe

Artists: Mike Carremans,
Brandon LaBelle, Gent Clapping Group,
Jeuno JE Kim, Raimundas Malašauskas,
Joris van de Moortel, Tisha Mukarji,
Sarah Pierce, Thus & Hence Ultra-red,
Katarina Zdijelar + Jean-Luc Godard,
Len Lye & Norman McLaren

MUSE / Higher Institute for Fine Arts
Charles de Borchgravestraat 167A,
9000 Ghent, Belgium

In the framework of Curator Curator,
a project initiated by
Katarina Zdijelar and
Hendrik Beversberg
www.sonicthinking.org

In collaboration with MUSE /
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Supported by the Flemish Community
George Joris van de Moortel



HISK

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AFTER ALL, EVERY- THING IS DIFFERENT IN THE END

**Mike Carremans | Brandon LaBelle
Gent Clapping Group | Nate Harrison
Jeuno JE Kim | Raimundas Malašauskas
Joris van de Moortel | Tisha Mukarji
Sarah Pierce | Thus & Hence Ultra-red
Katarina Zdijelar + Jean-Luc Godard,
Len Lye and Norman McLaren**

SEPTEMBER 25 - OCTOBER 18, 2009

Bonus tracks:

OCTOBER 5, 20.00 FILM NIGHT
Weekend by Jean-Luc Godard and short
films by Len Lye and Norman McLaren.
With an introduction by Hans Martens,
Artistic director HISK.
ART CINEMA OFFOFF, BEGIJNHOF TER HOYE,
LANGE VIOLETTESTRAAT 237, 9000 GHENT

OCTOBER 10, 02.00-03.00
RADIO PROGRAM
Radio Dinner by Raimundas Malašauskas
Radio Urgent FM 105.3 MHz in Ghent
and nearer region.
Online stream at
[HTTP://WWW.URGENT.FM/LUISTERONLINE](http://www.urgent.fm/luisteronline)

Curated by Jens Maier-Rothe

After all, everything is different in the end addresses itself to examine how listening as a simultaneous activity is subject to various notions of synchronicity. In other words, it faces the fact that, as Jean-Luc Godard once put it, one and one is not two but one and one.

Listening always coincides with other sensorial experiences and is itself a constant filtering and connecting of the multiple layers that constitute acoustic space. When we listen we constantly navigate between sensations in and out of sync. The twelve artists in this group show engage in a dialogue on the thinking processes behind these simultaneous levels of perception. They observe from different angles how listening has a unique ability to fabricate and deconstruct our common sense of synchronicity, and thus a desire for and against it. Together they set out a wide range of possibilities to turn these observations into a terrain for critical inquiry.

In an attempt to open up new spaces where critical thinking and perspectives on sound and listening can merge, the show breaches the boundaries of the conventional exhibition and listening space to explore unknown fields: events happen simultaneously at a distance far and close, a radio broadcasts the imagination of a broadcast, the audience is invited to shape invisible sculptures, one hundred people act as metronomes and sounds are teleported to spy out military grounds.

After all, everything is different in the end is the second exhibition in a series of Sonic Thinking.

More information at www.sonicthinking.org

AUDIO, VISION, TIME

DANCE INWARDLY

– Life moves fast. Don't miss a thing.¹

Every now and then, debates on sound in contemporary art still show a marked preference for marveling at physiological and psychoacoustic aspects of auditory experience.² In doing so, they take marginal notice of other, potentially more critical, philosophical implications of listening. It is time for a turn that shifts focus from the *matter of sound* to the *organisation of listening*, from asking “*what do we hear?*” to asking “*how is listening organised?*” This turn is about time in two respects: it is time for a critically informed dialogue on the position and organisation of listening within contemporary culture, and we need to become aware of how we conceive the dimension in which organised listening takes place – which is time itself.

What grants access to the social and political dimensions of listening is less likely to be revealed by a fascination for the ethereality of sound than by exploring the organisation of listening and its repercussions. Since the basic patterns with which we define listening situations – as private, public, collective, individual etc. – are intrinsically linked to the conceptions of space and time within dominant systems of knowledge production, they also ensue and rely on epistemological suppositions of time and duration. This is crucial as “*sound is irreducibly temporal.*”³ Without time there is no resonance. Sound is also inherently spatial for space allows sound to resonate. However, sound and listening are not so conciously alluded to in the critique of ideologies of spatial and institutional contexts. One might think of Brian O'Doherty's eminent study of the ideology of the white cube⁴, for instance, which does not mention listening at all. On the other hand, a few practitioners of institutional critique have addressed the organisation of listening, to a

certain extent, as can be read in Andrea Fraser's opening speeches or Sharon Hayes' examinations of public speech and language of protest. Then again, the so called category of ‘sound art’ recurrently tends to take a different route. Most of all, the field of site-specific sound installations keeps pulling back with an unsettling routine into opaque and spiritual grounds, where notions of time and duration can be comfortably enveloped in an uncritical sensation of the intangible space-time continuum. These positions obscure the fact that time and space are not externally given entities but discursively, politically and ideologically produced conceptions.

As we currently experience a transformation from industrial production to digital circulation, critical thinking about the perception of time is momentous. Everyday modes of perception are constantly changing and proliferating, which has tremendous effects on our notion of time. This gives particular significance to the synchronisation of auditory and visual experience and implicates new challenges for counter-hegemonic struggles to critically address audio-visual representation. Seeking for ways to measure up to the new conditions, critical inquiries into cultural representation are compelled to fall back on questions rooted in phenomenological concerns. How do we come to perceive the world in the way we do? How do episte-

¹ “Dance inwardly”, like every other first half chapter title in this essay, is originally a performance indication by French composer Erik Satie. “Life moves fast. Don't miss a thing.” is a PALM advertisement slogan, seen at a NYC subway station.

² A few days ago, I attended a roundtable discussion at the Unsound Festival in New York. ‘Listening’ was mentioned only once and at the very end of a long discussion that circled mainly around the physiological experience of sound. This although the panel included Regine Basha and Christoph Cox who I admire for their highly relevant work on the subjects of sound and listening. After all, I blame it on the time constraints that the discussion has not taken to more challenging directions.

³ Christoph Cox, *About time*: Christoph Cox on Sound Art, *Artforum*, November 2007

⁴ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the white cube*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999

mological premises administer modes of perception? What role does time play in this context? What exactly are the effects of capitalist modes of production on audio-visual perception and what forms of resistance do they ask for? And consequently, how can we get from resistance to productive critique? The following notes gather some reflections on that matter, not answers.

IS YOUR FEELING MELLOW?

– It's time to say auf Wiedersehen.⁵

French composer Erik Satie famously took his performance instructions down-right seriously.

No matter how odd some of them may seem, even to his greatest admirers, Satie insisted that they should be respected and eventually forbade reading them aloud during performances. Naturally, he may not have been delighted to see his directions misused as chapter titles here. Needless to say, I am sure it would have had a conciliatory effect on him to know that this essay engages in a critical perspective on listening and the commodification of time. After all, throughout his astonishing variety of work, Satie himself aspired to open up the minds of his performers and audiences to discover the subjective notion of time. In his later years, he would even refer to himself as a *phonometrician*, meaning a ‘sound measurer’, rather than a composer or musician. In his widely known, and to date, controversially received piece *Vexations* (rumoured to have been composed as early as 1893) Satie suggests playing its theme 840 times in succession. This led to an almost nineteen-hour ‘marathon’ when the piece was posthumously performed for the first time in 1963 by a group of pianists including John Cage, David Tudor and others. In its irreducible original form, *Vexations* is known as the longest musical piece in history, harbouring the potential to evoke an undeniably exasperating effect. As a matter of coincidence, the shortest recorded

song ever, written and performed in 1.316 seconds by the British grindcore band Napalm Death, sounds like a response: *You suffer*. In this spirit, seizing on Satie's directions as intertitles is meant to show how ‘time-less’ his work continues to be today.

In the 1920s German poet, playwright and theatre director Bertolt Brecht brought the distancing or alienation effect literally into play. At the heart of his ‘epic’ or dialectical theatre was the aim to break with the naturalistic construction of dramatic illusion and its ways to represent social conditions as a seamless whole. Brecht's idea of dialectical montage builds on various techniques such as the *gestus* as acting method, stylised language, inter-titles that disrupt the narrative flow, direct audience-address, to name just a few. According to Brecht, these techniques estrange the audience from represented situations and make the ordinary perceivable through the alienated, effectively showing that the prevailing social conditions are not as unchangeable as they appear to be. Altogether, this new realism would lead the activated audiences to critically reflect on their own life conditions. The number of theorists and artists who adopted Brecht's ideas into their work are nearly endless. Among the most prominent are filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard, dancer and choreographer Yvonne Rainer, and the Situationists International. In short, contemporary cultural production today is hardly imagineable without the influence of Brecht.

Both Satie and Brecht pursued the idea to interfere with normative models of representation, each at a different time and in a different way. In his critique of traditional realism, Brecht assumes that new conditions always demand new forms of critical contestation. It goes without saying that

⁵ For his song *Moon Over Alabama* from 1978, David Bowie adapted the original Alabama Song (mostly known from the opera *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, composed by Kurt Weill to a German libretto by Bertolt Brecht in 1930) and changed a chorus line from “It's time to say Good-bye” to “It's time to say auf Wiedersehen”.

power relations and cultural discourses have changed since then, as much as the perception of time has shifted immensely with huge technological advances over the past decades. Critical art practices will have to find ways to address these changes by directly challenging our modes of perception both in their spatiotemporal *and* in their non-spatial audio-visual dimension. For the latter it is crucial to examine how the temporal relations between the auditory and the visual shape a certain understanding of time. I want to suggest that a combination of Brecht's distancing effect with Satie's tactical assault on time may give us an appropriate foundation for furthering this investigation.

Combining Satie's and Brecht's approaches allows for a critical perspective, at a distance between far and close, from where one can discern how audio-visual representation continues to define and mediate our conceptions of time. In other words, we may re-read Brecht and replace the term 'dramatic illusion' with 'audiovisual time'.

WITH YOUR HAND ON YOUR CONSCIENCE

– We make perception out of things perceived.⁶

Epistemological knowledge assumes to create a consensus about the state of the world and how to perceive it. Ambiguities evoked by sensory experience are supposed to be resolved in foundational truth claims which in turn constitute our perception of it – a scheme that is essentially grounded on the idea that reflection follows perception; that sensation comes first. Shortly before the turn of the century, French philosopher Henri Bergson made unprecedented approaches toward a separation of an internal sense of duration (*durée*) from the dimension of space and the external measureable time (*temps*)⁷. It would be from there that Maurice Merleau-Ponty and other major phenomenologists began to challenge the sequential understanding of perception

and its inherent fabrication of a temporal dimension. After all, time is what allows us to think of successively unfolding events in the first place, with perception being followed by thinking in reaction. Phenomenological inquiries into the perception of time inspired a wide variety of thinkers to make attempts at linking perception and reflection more directly in their theories, or to even think of them as being one and the same process. The journalist and psychologist Rudolf Arnheim suggests in his book *Visual Thinking* that “*perceiving and thinking are indivisibly intertwined*”⁸ and that it should be of essential importance to reconsider the split between sense and thought as expressed in the various divisions of psychology, philosophy, the arts and the sciences.

Our ‘capacity’ to perceive the world esemplastically is thus not only guided but also fabricated by prevalent systems of representation and their inherent forms of knowledge production and circulation. What in fact rather acts like a kludge, as Sarat Maharaj aptly termed the co-workings of the sense faculties⁹, is impelled to crystallize unitary truths from what it receives. In short, sensory experience is preconceived in a way that matches certain knowledge paradigms. Critical practices have therefore repeatedly questioned the perceptive models and modes that adhere to these theoretical paradigms, with more or less success in history. As a matter of fact, the causality between perceptive modes and epistemological knowledge can only be probed by repeatedly shifting or interrupting it in operation, or by revealing its blind spots. The history of illusory techniques in visual arts however does not tally with a history of critical practice. From the ancient Greek legend of Zeuxis

and Parrhasius¹⁰ and the famous fly on the *Portrait of a Carthusian* to Op Art, the aesthetic form which focused on perception itself as key subject always suffered from the reputation that it sought to merely beguile the senses, never going beyond the representational surface to deal with ‘real’ and more urgent matters. The spectator, entranced in rapture by the *trompe l’oeils*, would only find him or herself trapped in a passive and idle state of mind.

Such a dialectical opposition of the mesmerizing illusion against one genuine reality is nowadays obviously not applicable anymore; neither to cultural representation, nor to the social conditions it presumes to represent, nor to the various forms of subject formation at play. Obviously, there is no truth but many truths, and the notion of the *trompe l’oeil* is worn out. Or, to apply the map-territory relationship, the illusion has become constitutive for reality. When originally the map began to exceed the territory while at the same time being contingent on it, thus leading to a state of infinite regress, one could say that now the illusion exceeds the referent of the real while at the same time constituting it.¹¹ The new media pervading everyday life on a multiplicity of layers make illusion virtually ubiquitous in all forms of cultural representation. At the same time, they make its continuous interruption and fragmentation predictable, since disruptive and distancing effects have been largely incorporated into mainstream film and advertising strategies. Brecht's concepts have been co-opted and turned against their original purpose to a large extent. They now operate within a disrupted but nevertheless unitary *audiovisual* spectacle. The interrelation between notions of truth, reality and mimesis has inevitably grown more complex, creating a thicket in which distinguishing the one from the other has become a puzzling, if not obsolescent, endeavor. Truth claims, as different ways of making society intelligible, cannot build exclusively on the original referent anymore, particularly not

on the visual document. Digital imagery effaced the ontological condition of the photograph. The truth of the image has left the building, so to speak. The evidence of experience¹² puts foundational and anti-foundational concerns up to new challenges when debating discursive productions of reality. Against this background, capitalist modes of production seek for new ways of structuring time as sensorial experience to generate a new and pertinent commodity form which “crystallizes modes of ideological perception.”¹³

BE AN HOUR LATE

– Power is articulated directly onto time, it assures its control and guarantees its use.¹⁴

The commodification of knowledge involves its extended circulation and accelerated synchronisation. Technological advancements engender new modes of multisensory perception that synchronize information and keep it flowing in the desired way. The ramifications of these synchronisation processes are perpetually reflecting back on our sense of time. Since the early 19th century, when the rise of the railway as a means of transportation made synchronised clocks and measured travel durations increasingly important to prevent train collisions. Consequently, the perception of time has never been the same. The coordination of simultaneous events began to play a key role in industrial capitalism and its need to master the forthcoming dimension of production:

¹⁰ According to this Greek ancient story, Parrhasius defeated Zeuxis in a painting contest by portraying two curtains so naturalistically that Zeuxis asked him to pull them back and reveal his oeuvre.

¹¹ Jorge Luis Borges, *A Universal History of Infamy*, Penguin Books, London, 1975.

¹² On experience and the notion of foundation see Joan W. Scott, *The Evidence of Experience*, *Critical Inquiry* 17, University of Chicago, 1991

¹³ Terry Eagleton, *The Author as Producer*, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1976, p. 67

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Random House, New York, 1975

⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge, London, 1962, p. 5

⁷ Henri Bergson, *Zeit und Freiheit*, 3. Auflage, Philo & Philo Fine Arts/EVA, Hamburg, 2006

⁸ Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1969

⁹ See www.sonicthinking.org for a conversation between Sarat Maharaj and Jens Maier-Rothe

circulation. Capitalism always had profound interest in unifying the experience of time as much as possible. Only if we understand the product, or at least internalize a desire for it, we become potential consumers. Thus, time must be reified and unified first, then fragmented again to create a desire for consuming. “*This unified irreversible time belongs to the global market, and thus also to the global spectacle*”¹⁵, as Guy Debord put it in 1967. With every mechanical and technological progress in the last century the perception of time underwent constant changes. Yet, these were small shifts compared to the groundbreaking effect which the information revolution – supposedly the greatest shift since industrialisation – would have on it since the late 20th century and onward. Particularly during the last two decades our notion of time experienced a tremendous shift, with a snowballing internet culture, and mobile gadgets like the smartphone, hurling everyday life into a new dimension of synchronized events and real-time circulation of omni-accessible information.

While at first this kind of technological progress seemed to bring contemporary culture closer to the idea of democratic media, promising egalitarian access and self-control, it also helped to incorporate tactical media concepts into neoliberal networks and it spurred on commercialisation of knowledge and information.¹⁶ With digital information as the upcoming commodity form, we are navigating toward endless circulation at lightning speed and further into a modus of maximized synchronisation until finally, the perception of time – as we know it – might be abolished completely. Writers like the collective Tiqqun have indicated, intricately, that this may be the case as the various control processes shift from industrial to cybernetic capitalism.¹⁷

However, our perception of time remains highly subjective. Regardless of how much our everyday life is contingent on synchronizing mechanisms we seem to be able to stay aware of our inner clock.

As a dimension, if indeed it is a dimension, time is to a large extent experienced as a tension between a ‘certain’ time and our sense of it – driven by an inner intuition of what Bergson would call *durée*. Above all, our notion of time is framed by death, by the end of that certain amount of lifetime which we say we own. In *Nachrichten aus der ideologischen Antike*¹⁸, Alexander Kluge’s nine-hour comment on Eisenstein’s cinematographic vision of Marx’s *Capital*, Boris Groys describes biopolitical visions in Russia at the turn of the century. Only eternal life could release humanity from the last form of private property as a key logic of capitalism. Who cannot die does not own a life, therefore no one can take it away. Only if the ownership of this certain amount of time could be abandoned there would be a way to make everyone participate in a socialist future. Should immortality thus become the goal for the next revolution? From a scientific perspective, such a proposal seems unrealistic, at least for the moment, let alone a hundred years ago. But the question of ownership might be rightfully posed once we think that this life-time is, to think along the lines of Foucault, essentially governed by a power-knowledge nexus. Even more so in times of a globally thriving neoliberalism.

Foucault’s writings shed crucial light on the mutual adherence of power and

¹⁵ Guy Debord, *The Society Of The Spectacle*, thesis 145, full text on <http://marxists.org/reference/archive/debord/society.htm>

¹⁶ See http://www.metamute.org/en/content/discussing_art_and_social_change for Marco Deseriis and Brian Holmes discussing *Will Bradley and Charles Esche (eds.), Art and Social Change: A Critical Reader*, Tate Publishing UK, 2008

¹⁷ The term ‘cybernetic capitalism’ has been coined by Kevin Robins and Frank Webster in *Cybernetic Capitalism: Information, Technology, Everyday Life*, in Vincent Mosko & Janet Wasko (eds.), *The Political Economy of Information*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1988. More recently it has been used in Tiqqun, *Kybernetik und Revolte*, diaphanes, Zürich-Berlin, 2007

¹⁸ Alexander Kluge, *Nachrichten aus der ideologischen Antike - Marx - Eisenstein - Das Kapital*, 3 DVDs, 570 minutes, Deutsche Originalfassung, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 2008

knowledge and furthermore disclose how the ordering of space into visible and invisible domains is dominated by power and control. His examinations of perceptual visibles and invisibles, I would like to suggest, can be applied to the audio-visual as well, or more precisely, to synchronized and unsynchronized time relations of sound and image. In similarity with Foucault’s panopticon structures and the way we move through space, audio-visual representation structures the way we move through time. According to common sense, only what is put in *audiovisual* order appears to be worth the time it occupies. A blurred audio-visual makes less sense, linguistically and epistemologically. It becomes noise, invisible and inaudible, empty of *audiovisual* time. Power, as Foucault argues further, is able to manifest itself positively in the fabrication of discursive knowledge that empowers people to govern themselves. This seems to be the case when more and more communication devices allow users to create and control audio-visual situations. In that sense, mobile phones with built-in cameras become the readily available means to reproduce and spread the *audiovisual* world of representation, at any time and in any place.

BE VISIBLE FOR A MOMENT

– What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be.¹⁹

Although Roland Barthes clearly states that his *Reflections on Photography*²⁰ is not applicable to film, I would like to suggest that his account of ‘mad’ photography at the end of his book could be extended to an entreaty to interfere with the ‘tame’ and synchronised *audiovisual* joint. Barthes’ punctum, the detail that interferes with the studium of a photograph, is directly related to Benjamin’s aura and thus indirectly to Freud’s notion of the uncanny. When mapping out the notion of aura, Benjamin

engages Freud to describe the psychoanalytic grounds of the phenomenon. Freud defines the uncanny as the recurrence of something that existed before but which has been repressed.²¹ It follows that the synchronisation of audio-visual relations, propelled by the circulation, reproduction and the reification of knowledge, could be understood so as to ‘repress’ alternative, asynchronous, forms of temporal and spatial experience.

How these relations are fabricated can only be revealed by dislocating their elements, or by a refraction of the line between sensorial experience and a subject’s consciousness. Only in a moment of rupture are we able to experience what Barthes marks out in a photograph as the second punctum, “*which is no longer of form but of intensity, [...] Time, the lacinating emphasis of the noeme, its pure representation.*”²² This interpretation is going far from Barthes’s original point of reference, which is the essence, or noeme, of photography. But it seems appropriate to move away from it since this noeme does not exist anymore. New technologies have rendered Barthes’s main ontological condition, that photography always carries a relationship between sign and referent which points to the real, obsolete. However, does not the Lacanian Real staring back at us precisely point to this noeme? It does, and this is exactly what the production and reproduction of images, as well as their circulation, is aiming for by pretending to recreate it. We can also find such a recreated real in acoustic space, for example in the voice of infamous eigh-

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, *A Little History of Photography*, in *Selected Writings*, Volume 2, Part 2, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1999

²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida - Reflections On Photography*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1982

²¹ “[T]his uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression”, Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (1919), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. & trs. James Strachey, vol. XVII, Hogarth, London, 1953

²² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida - Reflections On Photography*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1982

teenth-century castrato singer Farinelli, whose legendary singing voice was never recorded and existed only in memories. This was the case until recently, when his dead voice was somehow resurrected to make it audible in a Belgian bio-pic named after him. What we finally hear as Farinelli's voice in the film "*is generated by engineers at IRCAM [...], following an intricate computerized splicing of two contemporary singers.*"²³

Taking a photograph, or recording a sound, is about transforming temporality. It expands the present by creating the possibility to look at an image, or listen to a sound, at a later time. The act of conservation is effectively an attempt to counter the loss of time. This can be linked to the fear of death. Millions of images across the world represent points in time in which someone was not present and therefore could not participate. By making them visible visual culture continually constructs an ever-growing feeling of loss, and hence a desire to consume time by suspending and extracting it. The experience of time, of a moment in the present, seems to be incomplete without the act of perpetuating it, without saving it from its loss. Taking a photograph becomes a form of reifying time and of adding an exchange value to it. Barthes illustrates this with the image of a hunter who brings home more game than he needs for himself. The excess of goods then encourages him to use it for exchange. The picture taking tourist, like the hunter, wants to produce exchange value and not only use value. Even if the photographing tourist can find a better image of a site or landmark online, she may, regardless of knowing this, feel the desire to take a picture herself. Only the act of preserving it renders the notion of presence real. The preservation sets it in relation to a possible future and inscribes it into one's personal life time. Consequently, recording is a form of consuming not only the technical recording device but also of consuming time. Following the logic of consumerism,

a moment becomes 'unforgettable' only when it is consumeable as a whole, as an experience of the present, past and future simultaneously.

NOISELESSLY, BELIEVE ME AGAIN

– Every edit is a lie.²⁴

One particular incident, or rather accident, often comes to my mind when I think about sound in film and the notion of the *audiovisual* as a whole. A couple of years ago I was sitting in a fairly old movie theatre when the scheduled blockbuster film began, but the technician had forgotten to turn on the sound. It took him exactly thirty nine seconds to realize the mistake. With every second of complete silence in the room my enthusiasm grew for this experimental – if not radical – composition. When the accidental nature of the 'soundtrack' was revealed by a film character who appeared to be speaking, I felt foolish at first. Apparently, I was not the only one in the audience who was kind of mesmerized by the experience. From the seats came numerous expressions of fascination and many guests would even go on to discuss the experience afterwards. This was even more remarkable, as it had been the mere absence of just over thirty seconds of sound that left the audience dumbstruck. It made me think about how my personal sense of time has been influenced by audio-visual experiences in the past. Inspired by Barthes and Benjamin, I began to ask myself how my personal 'little history of audio-vision' would read like. Which audio-visual works had the biggest impact on my inner sense of time and where did it start?

From a historical point of view, the invention of film and the gramophone introduced the dimension of time to its relation with sight and sound. Their simultaneity and synchronisation quickly took up a

central role for both technical and creative aspects in the history of audio-visual art that followed, which can be divided into three main periods.

During the 1920s, experimentation with moving images was in the foreground. To a large extent the auditory had an accompanying function; music was predominantly composed to support the rhythm of an image sequence. With abstract film being in vogue during the 1930s, this relation turned around. The composition of images was more likely to follow the rhythm of popular music scores. Since the late 1960s and onward, sound and image in film became increasingly independent from each other. One could sum it up as a development from composing images *with* music, to creating images *as* music, to finally arranging images *and* sound.

It struck me that two films seemed to play a crucial role in this evolution. Over a time span of thirty seven years these films marked the beginning and the end of an important chapter in audio-visual history. Coincidentally, these two films have almost the same title: Walter Ruttmann's *Weekend* (1930) and Jean-Luc Godard's *Week End* (1967).

In 1921, Ruttmann created what is known today as the first documented piece of abstract film: *Lichtspiel opus 1*. The term *abstract* to describe the film referred to the fact that no concrete objects are seen, but rather a composition of geometric forms and paintings accompanied by a musical score. Early works of abstract film were often described as 'moving paintings' or 'paintings with time', possibly inspired by Ruttmann who was a painter himself. In 1927 he finished his opus magnum *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, and only two years later Dziga Vertov would follow with another monumental portrait of metropolitan life in the pioneering and breathtaking montage of *Man with a Movie Camera*. Inspired by the new technical possibility to print sound on film material, Ruttmann collected recordings over one

weekend in 1930 in Berlin and created an eleven minute piece of photographic sound composition with a narrative character: *Weekend*. Only one year later would Oskar Fischinger begin to further examine the technical relations between sound and image on film. Captivated by the abstract forms which optical sound recording produced on film material, he experimented with direct drawings on the film reel's optical sound track, and so created *Tönende Ornamente* in 1932, which pioneered as the first film with synthesized sound and is known as an early precursor of noise and electronic music. For Fischinger this was the beginning of a forthcoming synthesis of sound and image. What could be seen was the same as what could be heard when played back on the same medium and machine.

This idea of a synthesis of sound and image was the reference for numerous film theorists and filmmakers who either allied themselves with it or tried to get it out of the heads of their audiences. The majority of post-war mainstream cinema was a mere acoustic illustration of its imagery, which was stripped down to an unrealistically small amount of foley sounds and a dense musical score in order to guide the viewing audience through the narrative. Other more experimental filmmakers felt compelled to object to this kind of *audio-visual* narration. Certainly, the montage and music in the work of Sergei M. Eisenstein as well as the films of Fritz Lang, Carl Dreyer and the early Alfred Hitchcock stand completely on their own in this regard. Another major turn took place in 1962, when Andrei Tarkovsky's first feature film *Ivan's Childhood* (Иваново детство) introduced audiences to an entirely new approach to narrative structure in film that abolished the traditional *mise-en-scène* for a more associative 'logic of the poetic', as Tarkovsky would call it.

Two other filmmakers and their groundbreaking experiments in the early 1930s should be mentioned here, since

²³ Paul Elliman, The Voice Or Something (Part One), in *Metropolis M*, Volume 2/2009, Utrecht, 2009

²⁴ Although no official sources exist Jean-Luc Godard is often credited with making this comment on filmmaking

they are less well-known in art historical contexts: Len Lye and Norman McLaren. Lye began in 1935 to paint directly on the film itself and thereby invented what nowadays is known as direct film, handmade and cameraless films that often acted as visualizations of a chosen piece of music in the genre's initial days. For his earliest documented piece of direct film, *A Colour Box* (1935), Lye chose a popular Cuban song to which he composed a stream of fast moving and transforming series of abstract images. In contrast to other experiments in visual music Lye did not always try to arrive at a synchronous flow of music and images. His visuals work more as free interpretations of what can be heard. The capricious pictures and the sometimes exact and inexact overlays with the music reflected the style of modern Jazz. In a different film Lye used footage from a car factory and edited it into a one-minute sequence to the sound of African drum rhythms. Despite its short length, *Rhythm* (1952) is a true masterpiece of audio-visual montage, with jump cuts and repetitions in both sound and image.

Lye's work had great influence on the film maker Norman McLaren, who is one of the most well-known pioneers of animation. Inspired by Lye, McLaren produced a few similar direct films to Jazz and to other music that he synthesized himself. Next to his reputation as a sound synthesis pioneer, he also signed for one of the most well-known direct films, *Begone Dull Care* (1949), which interacts vividly with music played by the Oscar Peterson Trio. In 1952 McLaren directed another animation film *Neighbours* which would win him an Academy Award but, to the great surprise of many, in the category for best documentary. Combining innovative effects with a strong social message and extreme violence, *Neighbours* somehow foreshadowed the portrait of a morally degenerated and consumerist society in Jean-Luc Godard's work.

When opening in 1967, *Week End* was by far Jean-Luc Godard's most radical film. Its unconventional montage unsettled the view that film was supposed to form an audiovisual whole for the sake of an entertaining and intelligible narrative. Far from these expectations, the absurd imagery of *Week End* depicts an apocalyptic outlook on modern Western society afflicted by moral and social decay. The film's audiovisual language, for which Godard made excessive use of Brechtian techniques, influenced film makers, artists and viewers worldwide in their understanding of film as an experience that clearly addresses two senses simultaneously: the eye and the ear. Godard had implemented alienating effects of various kinds in earlier films, such as having actors address the viewer directly or leave the frame while talking. One might also think of how Godard replaced the usual opening titles by an introduction variably spoken by a male and a female voice in *Le Mepris* (1963). However, far more radical than his previous films, *Week End* completely turned its back on realistic narrative cinema. One intertitle cuts into a scene to suggest that the viewer is watching "a film adrift in the cosmos." A feeling of drifting into chaotic anarchy indeed manifests itself during the almost two hours of seemingly incoherent events. The film's form and subject matter represent a radical stance on bourgeois society, countering all narrative conceptions prevalent in mainstream film at the time. Released in or shortly before 1968, *Week End* and *La Chinoise* (1967) were among Godard's most political films and even said to have anticipated the upheavals of 1968.

As some sort of epilogue, *Week End* marks the conclusion of a period in Godard's work that would stand in deep contrast to the years which immediately followed it. Both significant for this apothotic moment in Godard's life and work, and anticipating its immense influence on film history, *Week End* concludes with the two titles 'End of Film' and 'End of Cinema'. The film drew a dynamic chapter

in the history of film to an end, since what Ruttmann's *Weekend* united technically, Godard's *Week End* uncoupled aesthetically: audio and vision.

LOOKING AT YOURSELF FROM AFAR

- Put yourself into brackets.
Live in the exception of yourself.
Well away from time.²⁵

If one had to list the names of all the theorists and artists who challenged traditional modes of audio-visual perception, the register could certainly go on forever. Besides Satie, Brecht and Godard, the Situationist International and their practices of psychogeography and détournement, would surely deserve another chapter of their own with regards to their influences. They have all shown compelling ways to create epistemological breaks by interfering with cultural representations and commonly sensed forms of the *audiovisual*. Their work is of invaluable importance for contemporary critical art practices that aim at questioning the normative and foundational intertwinements of power, audiovisual perception and knowledge production. New critical concerns can build on their achievements and continue their project of resistance against the commodification of time by making it visible and audible how "we are all caught within the scenario play of late capitalism"²⁶, as Liam Gillick puts it. I have tried to explain that this is also an *audiovisual* scenario played out in commodified time. Inasmuch as whenever *audiovisual* representation appears to serve the fabrication of desires under the auspices of capitalism, it necessarily affects the perception of time. For time as commodity is largely structured as a simultaneity of the senses and thereby chiefly appears as *audiovisual* time: sound and image variably arranged in synchronous and asynchronous relations to form a cohesive whole – that is, the *audiovisual* universe in which we are so well versed.

Jens Maier-Rothe

²⁵ Tiqqun, How is it to be done?
Printed by the *Inoperative Committee*, <http://tarnac9.wordpress.com>

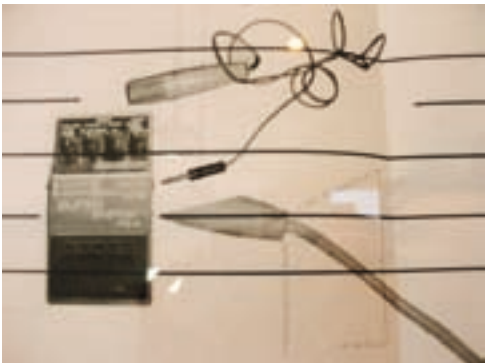
²⁶ Liam Gillick, Prevision – Should the future help the past?, first published 1998 by ARC Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris



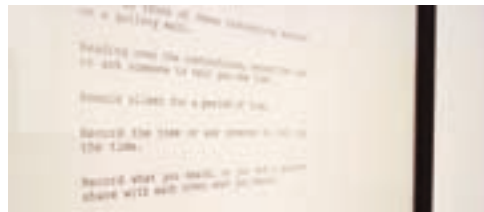
**Sarah Pierce,
Sonic Pass, 2009**



**Mike Carremans,
Peninsula, 2009**



**Joris van de Moortel,
Un Jeu Graphique Pour Jouer Sans Panique, 2009**



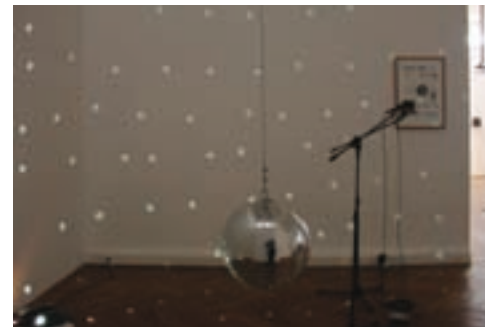
**Ultra-red,
Protocols For in Front, Behind and Beyond, 2009**



**Jeuno JE Kim,
Cheerleading is All About Synchronicity, 2009**



**Gent Clapping Group,
Performance at the Opening and Finissage, 2009**



**Thus & Hence,
Secular Rhythm, 2009**



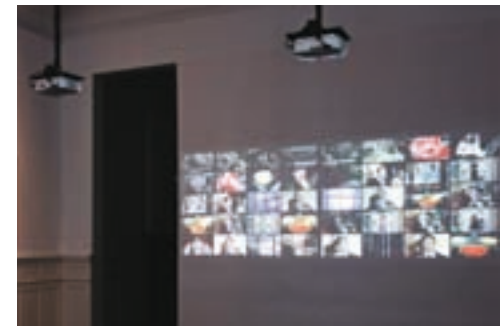
**Joris van de Moortel,
Un Jeu Graphique Pour Jouer Sans Panique, 2009**



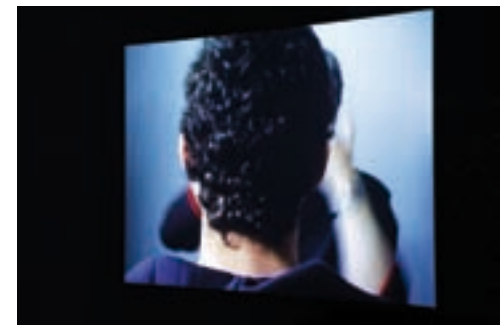
**Tisha Mukarji,
Metronome Series #2, 2009**



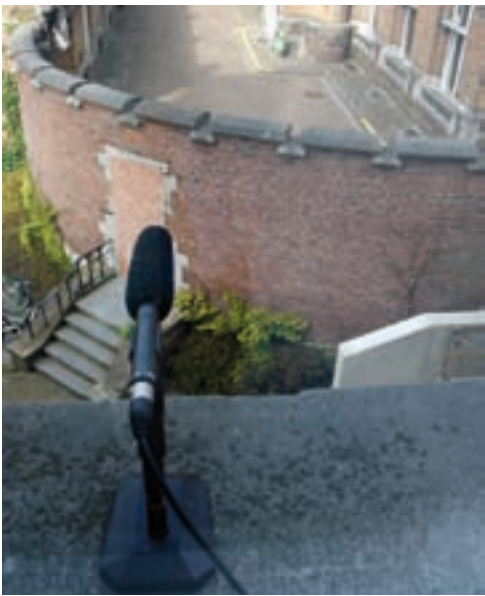
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Protocols For in Front, Behind and Beyond, 2009**



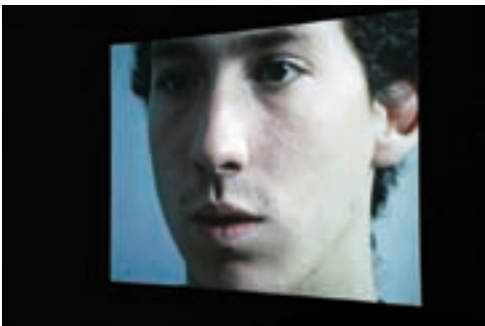
**Nate Harrison,
The (quick) Time Machine, 2003**



**Katarina Zdjelar,
The Perfect Sound, 2009**



**Ultra-red,
Protocols For in Front, Behind and Beyond, 2009**



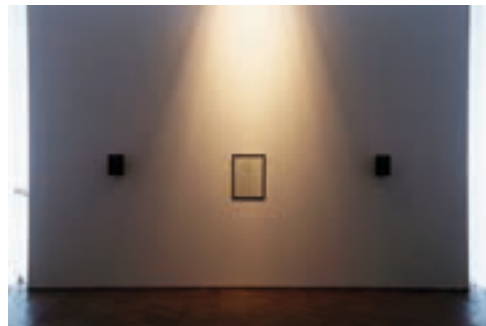
**Katarina Zdjeler,
The Perfect Sound, 2009**



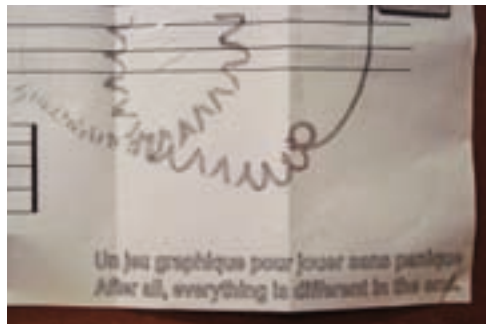
**Brandon LaBelle,
Concert, 2004**



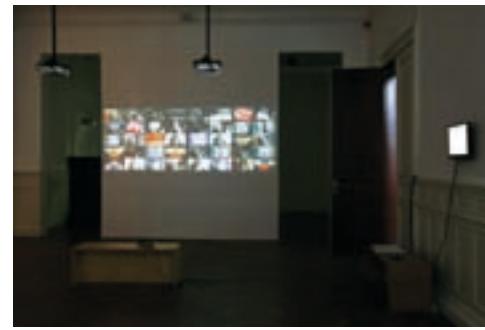
**Tisha Mukarji,
Metronome Series #2, 2009**



**Ultra-red,
Protocols For in Front, Behind and Beyond, 2009**



**Joris van de Moortel,
Un Jeu Graphique Pour Jouer Sans Panique, 2009**



**Nate Harrison,
The (quick) Time Machine, 2003**



**Raimundas Malašauskas
Radio Dinner, 2006 & 2009**



**Gent Clapping Group,
Performance at the Opening and Finissage, 2009**



**Thus & Hence,
Secular Rhythm, 2009**



Katarina Zdjeler, The Perfect Sound, 2009



**Ultra-red,
Protocols For in Front, Behind and Beyond, 2009**



**Brandon LaBelle,
Concert, 2004**



**Jeuno JE Kim,
Paris + English = Parish, 2006**



Thus & Hence, Secular Rhythm, 2009

CURATOR + ARTIST = ARTIST - CURATOR?

A conversation with Ricardo Basbaum

In being asked to reflect on my experience during the *After All ...* show for this book, I wanted to use the opportunity to write about my personal relation to curating which, if I had to define it broadly and at this very moment, is based on a potion of artistic research and collective thinking. The title CURATOR CURATOR already takes the institutional authority of the label curator with a grain of salt. At the same time it celebrates the poetic of its openness. Inadvertently, as I was assured by the organisers, the title also recalls an essay written by artist Ricardo Basbaum for the project *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated By an Artist*, a publication gathering diverse responses to the title statement put forward by curator Jens Hoffman in 2003. In his contribution *I Love Etc.-Artists*, Basbaum makes a somewhat ironic vocabulary distinction for which he forms various alliances between the labels artist, curator, and other professions or responsibilities. The conventional curator who focuses exclusively on curating should thus be tagged as 'curator-curator', Basbaum suggests. Shortly after I was invited to contribute to this book, I met Basbaum by coincidence when he was giving an artist talk and workshop in New York. I figured that altogether this prompted more than enough reasons for a conversation with him.

Jens Maier-Rothe: I was interested in having conversation because I think we share a few aspects in our practices. Collective thinking and collaborative work play an important role for both of us, while they lead us to different models of blending art practice with curatorial techniques. Our different positions, you being a visual artist and me acting here as a curator

interested in sound, also suit the concept of my exhibition 'After All, Everything Is Different In The End'. The relation between curating and art practice has been overly discussed in the past few years, which was in part driven by the major debate on art as a form of knowledge production. This frequently lead to a shift or even collapse of the line between the two roles with various intentions. Perhaps I should positions myself in that context before we go on.

I work as an artist and curator and sometimes I combine the two roles. This results in a hybrid which is often disregarded, particularly when mistaken as the one or the other. This certainly has its downsides, but can be productive as well. Collaborating and curating have always been part of my work as an artist. Some artistic projects resulted in exhibition making and some group shows I curated came out as collaborative installations. About two years ago I began to research on the role of auditory experience in art discourses. I realised very quickly that for this topic I would have to read across and experiment with extremely different practices, ideas and approaches of various artists, curators and thinkers. A mix of artistic and curatorial research seemed to be not only very productive but actually the only applicable method for this subject. Accordingly, I also had to find modes of production that would combine artistic research with exhibition making, collective thinking and writing.

Following the idea that sound, as a medium and methodology, would be highly invaluable for critical art practices, I wanted to find new ways of collectively experimenting with modes of display for sound. The initial question has remained the same till today: What shapes the social and political dimensions of listening and how can critical art practice inhabit them? Concepts like sound art and audio culture still feature as first-hand alternatives to visual repre-

sensation. Because listening is under-represented in critical discourse many people attach a counter-hegemonic quality to it per se. But I think this is a simplifying way to think about it and there is more to it. I want to explore and try to articulate what else there is, but a single person should not try to answer that question. Collective thinking across all kinds of practices is necessary to avoid that this results in a discourse among experts. This is why I engage people with diverse backgrounds in conversations like this one. The majority of your projects affects visual perception. However, your visual concepts often inspire me to rethink them in sonic terms. They seem to work in both ways of thinking. Do you see your work in any way connected to listening?

Ricardo Basbaum: It definitely is, yes. I often work with music. I actually did a lot more earlier in the 1980s, and now I try to explore it again. In certain talks or presentations, for instance, I recently mixed my speech with some sound work, but I just started experimenting with that. Somehow I have always been involved in musical contexts. I play the guitar and do sound experiments here and there. I got inspired by the work of John Cage and others, which made me think of all my speech as the sound of a singing presentation. So, what I would like to do is mix my writing with some sort of presentation that adds sound, to explore the sound of my voice, to repeat certain sentences as some sort of refrain and these kinds of things. But I've just started and I haven't done this many times so far, but it is definitely something that I want to explore more in the future.

J: What you describe reminds me of a performance piece by Robert Morris. In this piece *21.3.1964*, Morris gives a fake reading of a section from Panofsky's *Studies in Iconology*. In fact, he recorded himself reading beforehand and performs a lip-synch reading to his voice coming from a pre-recorded tape. A very early

lecture performance if you want. Actually, when you talked about your NBP project I had to think of sound all the time. You mentioned visual contamination, for example, a concept that reminds me of noise pollution and phrases like 'the word is a virus' and so on. I think contamination, in whatever sense, happens with sound very easily due to the pervasiveness of sound, and it might be interesting to compare how sound and vision contaminate our minds in different ways. I mean, sound travels in space and it links our bodies through resonant vibration. And then there is a kind of affect which you cannot really get away from because you cannot close your ears just like that. This all is very close to the notion of contamination and it makes me also think of a phrase by Arundhati Roy: "Once you see it, you cannot unsee it", which works in the same way like this: "Once you hear it you cannot unhear it."

R: That is interesting. You know, I think you could say that all my work is somehow affected by music. It always contains certain aspects of music and all the situations around it. Even if I do not directly work on that I am completely aware that my work is somehow crossed by that all the time. Recently, I presented a talk and a diagram during a symposium called SITAC in Mexico. I was asked by the organisers to develop a diagram that would function as a discussion of the main topic of the symposium and as a logo for the event. In my presentation I stressed the role that rhythm plays, not only on the diagram as a drawing but also when it interacts with the audience. Here I used the expression 'percussive politics', as a way to describe that you always relate to the public and that this relation is always permeated by some sort of rhythm or layers of resonance. So, in some way most of my work has been crossed by music or topics related to that. I'm very interested in that, not only because I play guitar or because popular music is really strong in Brazil, but also because I think

that curatorial work has some connection with music.

J: Music-making surely is a beautiful allegory for the collective aspect of exhibition making. A curator could never do a show completely alone, she always needs to work with other people, otherwise we would call her an artist, I guess. Even though in practice curating and making art works are mostly seen as separate, collective thinking is inscribed into the essential meaning and contemporary understanding of the term curating. If it doesn't have that aspect it's something else, at least for my understanding. In that sense, I also find a curatorial aspect in your work, for example when you collect and organise other people's reactions to an object you send around, like you did with the NBP shape. Versatility, like a curatorial concept, it like a container for an idea in relation to which people position themselves. That is where I see a parallel to my project, with the difference that I use an abstract idea and not a material object. I propose a certain way of thinking about auditory experience, that is, that we use the prevailing systems of knowledge production and their foremost visual paradigms to access and foster a sonic thinking instead of generating new vocabularies that then become preconditions for sound related debates. In short, there is a lot of complex visual theory out there, let's use it in the most direct way. That's what I'm trying to say, and I'm curious how people respond to that. Another difference between your project and mine is that you appear as an artist, whereas my approach is received as a curatorial technique.

R: I am not sure if I see that connection between our projects. Could you describe a bit more what you exactly do? How do you build your project that you consider is similar to mine?

J: So far, I asked various people to respond to the idea of sonic thinking in different ways, for example in conversations

like this one, or in the form of a contribution to a show, in an audio essay which then exists as reading and sound piece while both can be completely different from each other, and so on. I operate with these materials in different ways, in group shows that I curate, in installations, I use them for radio broadcasts, and so on. Over time, an archive emerges from that which then shapes and continues the initial idea and creates new responses. In your NBP project you send this shape or object around and invite people to do whatever they want with it. You send an object and I circulate an idea; two discursive processes that are very different but somehow similar.

R: The results and their presentation are also different, I guess. How do you think of the 'display' of sound in your work?

J: Sound is always not so easy to exhibit, because one source can easily dominate the space and contaminate the rest of the works. That also exists on a visual level, of course. Just think of the radical shift from a traditional hanging of paintings to Salon style exhibitions, where the visual spilling from one painting to another was the desired effect. The spilling of sound is a lot less controllable, of course, but it is definitely an interesting thing to work with when you create an exhibition. When you participate in a group show as an artist it's different. You don't have a lot of choices then. Other artists are very often afraid that your sound might interfere with their pieces. They are extremely reluctant to participate in an unplanned simultaneity of sounds and images, whereas they are more likely to trust in the sequence that a show builds in people's mind, however planned or not that might be or even can be in the end. When you curate a show with a lot of sound works, a lot of things happen accidentally. That can be a good and a bad thing. For example, I did a project where I considered the whole exhibition to be one big sound sculpture. That worked perfectly well with the concept in that case

where the show was about sound recycling. But it can also be problematic when you can't predict the behaviour of the single works, simply because some of them are too long to try it out in the space. Then you have to create some sort of hierarchy from the start.

R: Do you consider yourself a composer when you organize those sounds?

J: Not so much, because I want to get away from the notion of music and toward a more general understanding of listening. But the comparison works in a certain way, of course, since an exhibition organises its space and the sensorial experiences within it. Either way, there is always room for accessing a space in a different way, so if you want to use that trope it would have to be an open composition. I see myself more as a researcher and what happens in my shows often surprises me as well. I learn from that myself every time, which is totally OK I think, because how sound is received in exhibitions still needs to be tested out and treated in an experimental way. And as I said before, sometimes it's almost unpredictable how the works sound together in one specific space.

What about trying out some of your projects with a sound instead of a shape or visual element? Did you ever consider doing that? Would it even be possible, you think?

R: In this project with the NBP specific shape I see myself much more as a visual artist, even if I had been doing many multimedia projects at that time. With that object I had several experiences using sound as well. It has been used by a composer in Argentina for a concert, by a Turkish musician from Kassel who recorded sessions where he used it as a percussion instrument, or by a group of kids from Mangueira during a participative action in Rio de Janeiro in Brasil, who also played drums on it. So, this object has been used

in different ways to produce sound. But in the 1980s, before I was working with this shape, I worked in another project with a logo which looked like an eye. I spread this image on stickers to interfere with other objects and the architecture in public space, and there was a moment in 1987 when I did a large scale project with this eye during a residency at the University of Campinas in São Paulo. I invited the musician Sergio Basbaum to translate that image into some sort of sound logo, and he composed a short piece that lasted only seven seconds. This piece was then played from time to time at a certain point on the university campus, where I invited art and dance students to perform later on the same day. I haven't tried this with the NBP specific shape – to create a sound equivalent of anything like that.

In the 1980s I collaborated with Alexandre Dacosta in a performance duo. We composed short popular songs using nicknames to appear as different characters. In these songs we made comments on our work, on the art scene of Brazil in general, as a form of art criticism. These songs also worked as some kind of memory device, because popular music has this very direct effect on people's memories. There is also one song in which I comment on my NBP project, but I haven't released that one actually. I'm still working on it.

J: I guess, the material aspects make it difficult to replace the object with a sound too ...

R: I mean, in reference to what you mentioned about your project earlier, the distinction between vision and sound doesn't really apply here. The object I use here is strongly material, it has a weight, it is made of metal, you put your hands on it, while you cannot touch the sound. It's purely sensorial and immaterial. I almost never use the logo, or that specific shape as an image only. It is always embedded in the context of an installation or situation.

It doesn't make much sense for me to play around with the image itself. Anyway, sound is something that you don't touch, unless you are really sensitive and the frequencies are so low that they resonate in your body.

J: I would say it's actually the other way round. Sound touches you and you are not touching it. Let me give you an example that explains how I imagine the similarity between logo and sound. In one of your installations you placed the visual image of the NBP shape on a wall in the middle of a gallery space. The space itself is divided by many little obstacles on the floor. When people navigate through that space they have to look down on the floor to avoid stepping on one of the objects. In between they always look up to oversee the rest of the space while their eyes always go back to the image of the first shape. That way, the logo becomes imprinted in their minds, it remains as an idea in their head and will further on shape their thinking, maybe even long after they left the gallery. Isn't that similar to what you said about popular music?

R: There is more to it. The image is some sort of virus that circulates in our body. You're infected but you won't find it in your blood. It is there in the symbolic layers, in the image faction of your brain. The plot of the work would be that there is no place in your body where this image will stop, no space where this particle fits perfectly, and in a way it is this lack of space that makes you open up your body and then forces you to think differently. It is some sort of suggestion or involvement, and I cannot do anything else than just that. The other half of the work, you have to complete yourself. I want to produce some sort of transformation, but what kind of transformation exactly I cannot say. I cannot write the program. I mean, this is up to you. Of course, I believe that I can trigger that process more or less, but I can't tell you where it's going to lead.

I also believe that it will lead you into a transformation that enhances your thoughts or provokes your thinking process, making you feel much more aware of where you are, more alive. But actually I leave a gap, some kind of open space. I keep it open because I believe that other aspects of the work are unknown to me. The openness is part of the poetic of the work. It plays together with other references, other artists, other topics, and so on.

J: For the 'After All ...' show the sound activist collaborative Ultra-red did an installation in which two microphones transfer the sound from outside into the exhibition space. In fact, the sound comes from a part of the building which is used for military intelligence and medical training. All windows in the exhibition space are covered by walls. Only a glowing stream of light crowns the walls. Centred between the two speakers that fill the space with sound is a text that tells you how to interact with the listening situation in three steps; basically to listen in front, behind and beyond the wall. It's not even necessary to follow the steps. Just reading the instructions and thinking about the situation already has the effect that you carry the idea with you, and you will remember it and re-think it in other listening situations later on, at home, in public spaces, and so on. I find it fascinating that a pedagogical gesture, or proposal, can have such an effect on your thinking and maybe even your perception. I think the effect you are talking about is closely related to that. It also works on a pedagogical level to some extent.

R: I agree. Both projects are about making you aware of where you are, about taking you directly to the present time, to the here and now, which are the conditions of perception. Somewhere on your website you mention Rudolf Arnheim, who was completely into Gestalt-theory, or even phenomenology, and very aware of the senses. And of course, this is a very important topic. I agree with you,

because when you are confronted with these instructions in your example, or the obstacles in my installation, when you are taken to the here and now, to the specific site, it means that you are becoming aware of sensorial layers. Because all sensorial experience is based on a radical presence, you have sensorial experience only in the very present moment. Everything that comes later is only representation, and it is a very unique moment. I see this as a connection between the two examples. What also plays an important role in my work is that this aspect of sensorial relation to art works is a very strong issue for Brazilian contemporary art. It started in the late fifties with the first steps of Lygia Clark and others, and from that moment the idea of phenomenology to relate sensorially to a work of art became very strong. So, I was confronted with that heritage somehow. If you worked here you were confronted with that. But I was also trying to update that for myself through reading the work of Foucault and Deleuze. They somehow relate to phenomenology since they believe in the sensorial and gave a lot of significance to affect and direct contact. However, they were also critical of phenomenology because they think it is based on a kind of fiction of purity that doesn't exist any more in terms of having direct contact with the work only through the senses. So, Foucault introduced discourse at the same moment as we still talked about sensorial contact, because he believed that there is nothing before knowledge, no moment before words, as phenomenologists liked to believe. This was an anti-foundational concept. According to Foucault, there is no space before the sensorial and discourse begin, and that was very important for me and my NBP project, because I was kind of free to organise both layers at the same time; all the discourse around the work and all the material or sensorial aspects. It's like hitting two birds with one stone, so to speak.

J: Did other Brazilian artists do that at the same time? Was there some kind of movement or were you the only one?

R: There were a few people working on similar ideas or in resonance with that. They are people with whom I am in dialogue, some art historians and even art critics. However, it's not so transparent. The discourse in Brazil between people in the art world can sometimes be too much based on daily or direct issues and not so much in terms of theory. But yes, I would say there are people here who work on and share the same register. Deleuze is very influential somehow. There are groups working with his concepts, studying his writings and doing related film and video works. I published a text in a reader on the reception of conceptual art. It was published in 2006 by MIT and the Generali Foundation. Perhaps you are aware of that book. It's called *Art After Conceptual Art* and was edited by Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann. My essay in it is based on those assumptions more or less, to try not to separate the sensorial and the conceptual, which is what common sense – or even some readings of art history – try to pull apart. I think it's important to end this. Now it's common sense to put together all those conceptual aspects that are organised through discourse, but also through the sensorial aspects, to make any art work provocative.

J: I think sound would be a very interesting medium to explore that, taken as a methodology to go more into that direction, because sound triggers completely different behaviour among audiences, mainly due to its immediate, immaterial and ephemeral appearance.

R: Yes, I think you're right, especially in the way you and your peers play with that. Sound is very challenging and for sure it puts together very directly conceptual aspects and a kind of bodily sensorial reception.

J: This conversation will appear in a publication that documents an exhibition series called CURATOR CURATOR. In your entry in Jens Hoffmann's book *I Love Etc.-Artists*, you suggest a semantic differentiation between the various forms of professional engagement in art, for which you use the expression 'curator-curator'. I think it wouldn't make too much sense if I tried to summarise your statement, so I suggest that our readers look it up online*. My question to you would be: Do you think something has changed since 2003? The last Documenta in 2007, for instance. Did it show for you that Hoffmann's statement is still valid, maybe even more than it was before? What would you like to add if you were asked to comment on it today?

R: I think the statement is still valid, absolutely. However, a lot has happened since then. Shifting between curatorial and artistic positions or thinking of them as going together has become a lot more natural. Also, a lot has changed in terms of how the two roles come together in person. Here I think that artists are now more aware of their curatorial role, while many curators still aren't conscious at all of their artistic qualities when creating some kind of big installation work with a show, for instance. In general they don't assume that artistic interference as much as they should, I think. Some curators can be very manipulative and they sometimes really manipulate the artists' work. A certain negotiation should always take place between the two, but sometimes it simply doesn't. Either way, with regard to these roles, it's interesting to see that both artist and curator share, or can share, similar concerns. Very often we see these roles taken apart institutionally, that is, by the institutions or the institutional networks that create them as separate positions. This separation is not based on any given nature of both roles. If they want they can share many issues. So, I think my response to Jens Hoffmann's statement still makes sense and I wouldn't change today what I said six years ago.

J: Do you think that this blurring of lines between curator and artist has made questions of authorship and representation more complicated and problematic in the past years?

R: Authorship should always be shared somehow. If you are aware of what is attributed to each of the positions it should be clear what each one has contributed to the collaborative situation. I made many exhibition experiences with different curators who take on this role of a dominant organiser and manipulate some of the art works. But if the artist and the curator sit together and talk, they have a chance to find a common agreement for that. When there is room for conversation this negotiation can really happen. Too often the institutional profile does not provide this kind of conversation, as I've seen in Documenta for instance, mainly due to the scale of the shows and the time constraints during the realisation process. In the case of Documenta 12, the curator made some very strong interventions in the spaces, like painting the walls and other things. My experience has shown though that when both artist and curator have the possibility to sit down and discuss their collaboration they tend to find a common point. In such a scenario, artists often accept the intervention of the curator, because then it makes sense to them. But when this conversation does not take place the artist may feel like the curator invaded the space and awkward situations are the result.

However, even if they have a conversation they sometimes don't find themselves in agreement, and maybe then the artist should just leave. So, I think if you are an artist in a show with a curator then there should be a conversation between the two, otherwise it doesn't make sense. If there is no dialogue, no common ground, what are you doing in that exhibition as an artist anyway? Unless it's completely formal or conventional and market oriented.

* http://www.e-flux.com/projects/next_doc/ricardo_basbaum.html

J: Some Documenta 12 artists, like James Coleman, rejected the colour schemes and insisted on having their own spaces. But I think the last Documenta also took this problematic curatorial intervention into the next level: that of modes of display. The audience wasn't properly informed about the formal decisions made by the curators, which made it extremely difficult for the average visitor to distinguish what came from the artists and what from the curators. Perhaps this was even intended and formed part of the show concept and its modes of display. I would say, there are at least three levels on which this problem can occur in an exhibition project. One level is the collaboration between the two roles while the exhibition is produced. The second level is how that collaboration is then represented in the exhibition. The third level is the way in which the documentation of the project represents that collaboration. And I think on the third level the question of authorship cannot but create a conflict. I see that as a big issue in my work, not only because people always want to see images even if I am talking about art works which in fact mainly or exclusively operate in sound. What I find worrying is that I always take on some kind of authorship when documenting an exhibition, an authorship that is not given to me as a curator. In the least problematic case what I show is the result of a balanced exchange between myself and others, but very often I merely represent other people's work. I try to deal with these questions when I document my exhibition projects on my website.

R: The lines are completely blurring, that's right. I think the curatorial lines should definitely be made more transparent for the audience because, as you said, in my case the green carpet in the installation was not my decision – I wanted another material. Actually, I wanted to play with some artificial grass, but the curator convinced me, after several meetings, that I should use this carpet. He was very convincing in his arguments and I accepted, but the audi-

ence doesn't see that later on. These examples reveal that those curatorial gestures were made somehow invisible. I think curators should make these gestures clear for the audience and find ways to train people to see these things. Why not do this in the same way as catalogue texts or allow labels to inform about the concept and materials of an artwork?

I also like to use words like curatorial installation or curatorial sculpture because as a curator you organise the works of other artists in a certain way for specific reasons, or you even organise the space itself in some way. For example, you may decide to paint the walls. Whatever you do, those gestures should be made transparent for the audience. They should be labelled or attributed, and not just become invisible. This is something that could be really thought about.

For instance, in the 7th Mercosul Biennale (2009) the two main curators (a curator and an artist) only nominated artists as curators for all sections of the show. There was a sound project, a public intervention project and so on, and they were all organised and created by artists – even the information system. There were four or five big warehouses, each one for a different project by one of the curators, and one of them was really radical in terms of curatorial intervention; Laura Lima, the curator, covered the space with several tons of sand and all the artists had to work with that intervention. Video artists, painters and performance artists all agreed to display their works in that space. It was completely transparent who did what and in a way you could read these warehouses as big curatorial installations. Of course, some art works were more, and others less, embedded in the curatorial context. With some of the pieces you even had difficulties to identify them as artworks in the environment. However, the big difference to Documenta 12 is that here they created a system of information which made it

very clear who did what, and you could actually enjoy it more because of that.

J: I think the idea you just mentioned is actually very interesting; to create a detailed register that traces the decision making process of an exhibition. That could be a project in itself. A documentation of how artists and curators collaborated, a list of all the steps taken by the different people involved. In that context, and along with the example you just gave, I'm also wondering what it actually means to engage the term 'curator' or 'artist' to define someone's role in the whole process. Wouldn't it be better to just name the people and literally say what they did, instead of attributing a title that adheres to certain conventions within the division of labour? I know this is a provocative idea since it somehow questions the profession of the artist, but that's not my point ...

R: I think it's important to keep attributing some specific work to the artist, to reserve some space for mobility. We can also enact the roles in such a way that they blend into each other. If we are speaking institutionally, it's interesting to differentiate the roles – or rather the responsibilities – with respect to the specific kinds of collaborative work. As an artist, the convention of calling something an artwork already has a function and you have to take responsibility for this act in terms of what its meaning is or can be in the future, how it relates to the audience, what conceptual layers you provide in a particular piece etc. This responsibility should be taken by someone and in the same way the curator has to take responsibilities when organising an exhibition with different people. As an artist at Documenta 12, I could only think about my own work. I had no idea how the exhibition was planned as a whole. The only people who could think about the exhibition as one giant entity were the curators. I could only see my work and I didn't have access to all the information. There

were clearly different responsibilities and we could see the different roles. I think this is interesting for certain contexts, but at some point it's also important to consciously enact the roles in such a way that they blend when, in a certain moment and for one particular gesture, it would be more interesting to mix the roles. It can be productive to see how we can take the one for the other in a certain situation. So, I think sometimes it's necessary to assume certain responsibilities with regard to the artwork and its conventions, and sometimes the roles need to be exchanged or mixed.

J: I was thinking more about the terms themselves and how we use them. For me these words, and that includes other terms like 'the critic' to some extent as well, only serve as place holders in most discussions. The terms themselves don't mean anything but the discourse around them is what's interesting. I'm particularly curious about their overlaps and grey zones because they can stimulate new debates, as you just said, about how artistic practices and their modes of display shift, have shifted or will change in the future. The curator Raimundas Malasauskas made a great remark during a symposium in Rotterdam earlier this year. He said that curatorial discipline is probably the one that is mostly affected by the concept of always changing the model without actually trying it. I think he really brought it to the point. The label curator can mean a lot of things, what you do in practice and how you position yourself in relation to that term is what makes the difference; what is behind your use of the term and how that relates to the art world and other social contexts. Speaking of overlaps, your NBP project, for example, is a large participatory project and obviously has a curatorial component as well, no?

R: I agree that these labels are empty words unless you really practice them. This project you just mentioned, "Would

you like to participate in an artistic experience?”, indeed involves many people and I feel I’m some sort of administrator of the process. I have to contact different people, I organise gestures, I make it all happen. Somehow I create this structure to present everything publicly, which is the website. So, I guess you could almost call that a curatorial project, yes.

J: In your text *I Love Etc.-Artists*, you write, “When artists curate, they cannot avoid mixing their artistic investigations with the proposed curatorial project: for me, this is the strength and singularity they bring to curating.” Is this something you also try to do as an artist?

R: Yes, in some way. As an artist I have been working as a critic as well, writing reviews, introduction texts for catalogues, and I also did curatorial projects. Having the chance to work with these different roles at certain given moments, it was clear to me that I didn’t want to be just a critic or a curator. I knew that if I would do those things, writing or organising exhibitions, I should do them in a different way – a way that brings those activities closer to my preoccupations as an artist. I can only write about artists who I feel have some connection to the kind of work I do myself, for instance. It became clear for me that there should be a difference between an artist who writes, an artist who curates and a curator-curator. Whichever role they take on, artists should mix their poetic preoccupations and the issues of their work with the preoccupations of the critical or curatorial gesture. I would not like to do a curatorial project that brings me far away from what I do as an artist. It would not be so interesting. I would not have much to say. But of course, in the same way curators can also mix their own investigation as researchers, as anthropologists, as philosophers and so on with the curatorial statement.

J: As I mentioned at the beginning, curatorial and artistic research are quite similar

practices for me, if not identical in some cases. I see artistic research as essential for my curatorial work while exhibition making can both serve as a research tool and result in collaborative artworks, too.

Thank you very much for this conversation, Ricardo.

R: Thank you, too.

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