



The Fellow Reader #1

# On Boycott, Censorship and Educational Practices

*Cover image* Erick Beltrán, *Doppelgänger in the self*,  
diagram, 2015. Image courtesy of the artist.

Renata Cervetto  
de Appel arts centre

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# About Boycott, Censorship and the New Borders of Curating

Through an accelerated development of curatorial consciousness, the role of the curator has achieved an important position in the art world over the last two decades. The rise of this profession coincided with the spread of new communication systems in the early 1990s and the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. These two elements enabled a wide and fertile field for curatorial exchange. The curatorial landscape expanded, with a growing number of biennials, museums and art fairs spread throughout different parts of the globe. This seemingly positive development is superseded by a more complex ethical question concerning the use of contemporary art. The rapid development of access and exchange is increasingly defining cultures and contexts.

Due to the proliferation of information flows, economic and democratic processes are confronted with new political and ethical questions that, in a certain way, also affect the basic concept of art. From an economical point of view, the globalized art world is characterized by an incredible diffusion of capital. From a cultural point of view, however, the globalized art world shows radical differences in geographies and cultural backgrounds, which also imply different perspectives on notions such as (artistic) freedom. As such, it seems there are forms of restrictions and borders that complicate the flow of information and data. In recent years the instances of boycotts and censorship in the art world have increased. The diffusion of contemporary art on a global scale is more and more confronted by the limits and differences of social, political and economical conditions that surround exhibition activities.

In this publication, three particular dynamics that are occupying an interesting space in the art world today are examined: boycott, censorship, and mediation. The public event *Hello my name is boycott* revealed the complex idea of a paradox in contemporary art works, the spreading of a system and its ethical and de-ontological basis. This panel discussion with Clare Butcher, Yazan Khalili and Nicoline van Harskamp aroused the question: at what point does something stop working? Boycotting is essentially a different grammar of perspective that generates other values in different contexts. The paradigm of the boycott is based on a clash of different points of views. These points of views are activated in a context that is, from a relative perspective, 'neutral', like major art exhibitions such as biennials and triennials. Inside these contexts, based on a certain openness generated by contemporary art, it is increasingly more usual to create some contrast between the use and abuse of that supposed neutrality, for instance by different political and economic interests.

The notion of censorship is basically used to avoid these contrasts. In *Before and After Censorship*, a round table discussion with Galit Eilat, Sabina Sabolović, Joanna Warsza, Loreto Guzmán and Federico Zuckerfeld, various aspects of this argument were discussed. Three main themes emerged: boycott as a limit of the art world, censorship as a limited range of tools available for the development of contemporary art, and education as a tool through which to reflect on the complexity to bridge the gaps between them.

Both boycott and censorship have an effect on information. Many of the recent cases of boycott and censorship have generated strong forms of media attention. For this reason the third aspect of this publication is based on the notion of mediation and the extension of spaces for discussions and information exchange. Indeed, education is a form of information itself. Together with TAAK, de Appel arts centre presented *Surrounding Education. Towards new integrations within the artistic and curatorial field*, a two-day symposium where the role of education in contemporary art was discussed through

the approaches and experiences of Mônica Hoff, Yoeri Meessen, Priscila Fernandes, Erick Beltrán, Ane Hjort Guttu, Juan Canela and Frans-Willem Korsten.

During all three public events, the three themes of boycott, censorship and mediation were further examined in an effort to find some answers, or perhaps raise more questions, about the potential uses of curating and artistic practice today. These public events, together with this publication, were organized by Renata Cervetto, alumna of the Curatorial Programme '13/14', who was awarded the first Curatorial Fellowship of de Appel arts centre. I thank her for her commitment and vision.

Lorenzo Benedetti  
*Director*  
*de Appel arts centre*

Introduction:

On Boycott, Censorship and Educational Practices

Renata Cervetto

*The Fellow Reader #1* compiles a selection of narratives, personal experiences and perspectives from artists and art workers at large. These stories may overlap in time, complement each other, or just collide. They are attempts to revisit particular events that have marked the way we approach and think about artistic and curatorial practice, their function and relation within everything else. Curatorial research may have multiple beginnings according to particular interests and given contexts. In this case, the topics of boycott, censorship and education were the three cords from which I began to weave my own braid. More than isolated topics, these cords intertwine social, political and institutional scenarios that influence and condition the way the artistic medium relates with, and is communicated to, a larger audience.

Boycotts have been taking place for a long time and not only in the artistic medium. Back in 1968, we may recall how African-American athletes joined forces to denounce the lack of civil rights of the black American community in the US during the 19<sup>th</sup> Olympic games in Mexico. However, other cultural boycotts are still silenced or not revisited enough, for example the cancelation of the second Biennial da Bahia and its curator's imprisonment during Brazil's darkest military dictatorship. In order to achieve their effect or generate certain awareness, the strategy of boycott or withdrawal threats as tactics need to be followed by a public debate, where the media plays a central role in defining the situation and the parties involved. Back in 1966 the Argentinean artists Roberto Jacoby, Raúl Escari and Eduardo Costa unveiled their power by creating an 'anti-happening', mediating through newspapers a situation that never took place.

No matter what position we adopt, most of the time our opinions are based on what we have read, heard or seen. Going through these situations in real life is different – something else is at stake. Deciding what to say or what to silence plays a key role when defining your own position. This could in many ways explain why some stories remain untold.

In most cases, boycotts trigger debates that go beyond the ‘artistic’ event itself, and when this happens, there is an actual opportunity to learn and see things from a different perspective. The first part of the book starts with an image and two essays by Yazan Khalili. The image belongs to the series *Cracks remind me of roadkills*, in which marble floors, old walls or abstract and unfocused close-ups are in dialogue with situations that might or might not have taken place at some point in time. The stories follow the same criteria, and together with additional extended comments they bring us deeper into the meaning and consequence of what freedom of speech implies. In March 2015, Galit Eilat, Sabina Sabolović and Etcétera... were invited to revisit some of their recent projects in *Before and After Censorship* – a discussion that took place in de Balie, Amsterdam. A written version of their presentations is presented here, where Federico Zukerfeld and Loreto Guzmán describe their project in the 31<sup>st</sup> São Paulo Biennial, complemented by an interview with Charles Esche conducted in February 2015. Sabolović discusses how, as part of the curatorial collective What, How & for Whom/WHW, they have encountered censorship and its threat both in the public and private institutions with whom they have worked. Francisco Camacho brings back the *Salon des Refusés* from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to reflect on possible artistic alternatives of confrontation. Following the lyrics of Sun City, the song written by Steven van Zandt to protest against apartheid in South Africa, Clare Butcher introduces this topic and combines it with her recent and intensive research experience during the 31<sup>st</sup> São Paulo Biennial.

“If art is located where it appears not to be, then where is art?” This question, posed by Mônica Hoff, will try to find its answer in the second section of this publication. Further questions include: what shape does educational thinking take in curatorial and artistic processes? The following projects share a similar approach in the way they relate with institutions and how they articulate the artistic field with other practices and contexts. *Lesson 0* is a project developed in Barcelona by Juan Canela and Ane Agirre for the last two years. In his text,

Canela analyzes the ways in which four exhibitions and a complex public program fostered multiple collaborations between artists, curators, schools, cultural practitioners and the local public of Barcelona, stating how these dynamics played a central role in the way the project was developed.

In 2007, the 6<sup>th</sup> Mercosul Biennial introduced a new way of approaching the curatorial task. It proposed that from this edition on, the conceptual proposal should consider its pedagogical dimension from the beginning. This took shape in Porto Alegre, Brazil, through the figure of the ‘pedagogical curator’, a role adopted for the first time by the artist Luis Camnitzer. Mediators suddenly were assigned new responsibilities, as they would become part of the thinking process and setting of the biennial, speaking with the artists and curators and conducting self-proposed activities. The Brazilian artist and educator Mônica Hoff, in charge of the biennial’s educational projects from 2006 to 2013, reflects on how this change in the mediation role came into being, the challenges of working with education within a biennial context, and the implications and responsibilities of their task towards local communities, schools, artists and the general public. The interview with artist and educator Sofia Olascoaga take us back to her beginnings at art school and the Mexican artistic scene during the late 90s, recalling how her interest in generating collaboration and group dynamics became her central goal through all her projects until today. *When artworks resist mediation*, a text of my authorship, attempts to analyze the consequences of bridging performance with educational purposes through three different works.

The final section of this publication deals, on the one hand, with education as a topic and strategy within artistic projects. To begin, curator Katia Krupennikova interviews Masha Ru on the *Grondstof* project, an artistic contribution to the program of De Boe school in the east of Amsterdam. Priscila Fernandes and Erick Beltrán show how artistic research arises from particular situations or contexts and lead to unexpected discoveries. Through her book *Y El Arte?* (*What about Art?*) Fernandes

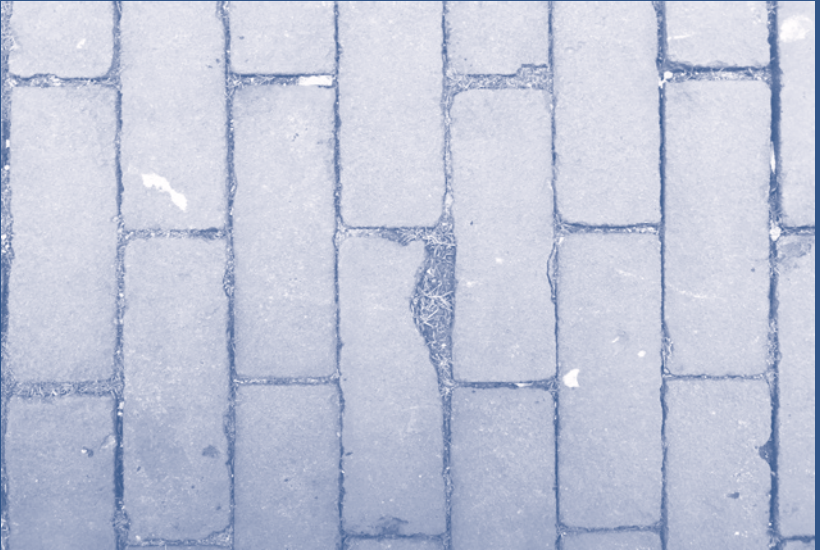
imagines how aesthetic education could have been framed in the context of *La Escuela Moderna* [The Modern School], founded by Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia in 1901 in Barcelona. Her compilation of texts and essays address a particular turning point in the way education was being and could possibly be executed, mainly employing pedagogy as a tool for revolution; according to *La Escuela Moderna*, ‘to live in a free and egalitarian society.’ Erick Beltrán revisits his project *Double goer* (2014), which activated part of the São Paulo Biennial archive through a collaborative project developed with *União Popular das Mulheres* in Campo Limpo, a particular neighborhood in the outskirts of the city.

The Norwegian artist Ane Hjort Guttu tackles the complexity of what artistic education entails in her video *Time Passes* (2015). In this work, Damla, an art student in Bergen, triggers an intensive debate among her colleagues and tutors when she explains her final project, which consists of silently joining a Romanian migrant while she begs in the street, every day for several months. This video combines some of the topics she has been working with, such as notions around status quo, (institutional) power relations, and emancipation processes. She also appeals to the particular context of an art school, and ultimately its purpose and role within the artistic formation. “The point of art being teachable or not still remains one of the primary pedagogical issues everywhere,”<sup>1</sup> argues Luis Camnitzer. Provocative as this phrase may sound, it may trigger alternative ways of sharing knowledge and experimenting creative processes outside the school itself. This is, at least, one of the many premises the *School of Missing Studies* (SMS) had during its temporal master program between 2013–15 at the Sandberg Institute (Amsterdam). The SMS, an initiative of the Dutch collective Bik van der Pol and other artists, started in 2004 as a mobile, collaborative platform mostly focused in public

1. Camnitzer, Luis, “In Latin America. Art Education Between Colonialism and Revolution”, in *Art School (Propositions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century)*, ed. by Steven Henry Madoff, MIT Press, London, 2009.

space and urbanism. The Master, however, was structured in thematic ‘islands’, a research project in Nagele and many, long conversations among the participants. As part of the curriculum, the group spent two months in São Paulo during the timeframe of the 31<sup>st</sup> Biennial *How to (...) things that don't exist*. *A picnic in a Grove* is a conversation with three of its students attempting to grasp what this project entailed on a practical and theoretical level, its challenges and contradictions.

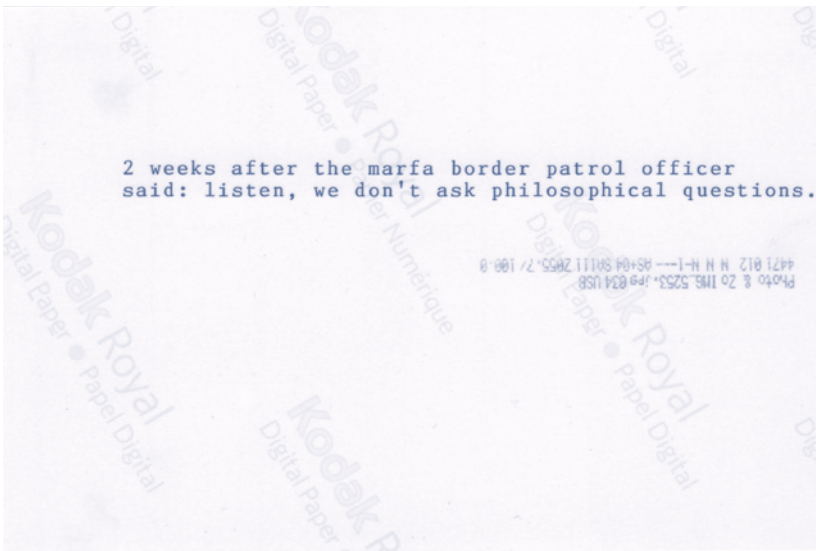
The closing image documents a performance by Grace Kyne-Lilley, as part of the *School of Missing Studies*’ project in the Dutch city of Nagele. I would like to think of this image as the beginning of a undefined journey that starts with these pages and that you, fellow readers, will continue at your own pace.



Yazan Khalili, *Cracks remind me of roadkills (series)*, 2015.  
Photograph and text 15 x 10 cm.

## Freedom of Censorship

Yazan Khalili



Photograph and text 12 x 10 cm.  
Yazan Khalili, 'Checks limiting me of freedoms' (series), 2012.

\*

These 2 stories are part of Yazan Khalili's thesis *Freedom of Censorship* for his MFA at Sandberg Institute, Amsterdam, June 2015.

## I.

In Democratis, the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Ziad Rahbani's famous radio show, bearing the strange title *Tabi'a La Shi Tabi'a Shi* (belonging to something belonging to something), he tells of a playwright who writes a play about a playwright writing a play about censorship in his society. The playwright takes the play to the censorship office for approval, and the play gets rejected. Now, the real playwright takes his play to the real censorship office for approval, and when it gets rejected, he asks "but why?" The censor answers, "Look, there is nothing wrong with the play itself, except that you are lying about censorship. You see, we don't reject plays that speak about censorship." Furious, the playwright responds "But by rejecting it you are proving that I'm right." The censor replies, "This isn't true, we are only censoring it because you are lying and we can't let such lies spread around town." This goes on and on, and the sound fades out and is replaced by funky jazz music.

In his lecture *The Need to Censor Our Dreams*, Zizek<sup>1</sup> talks about social codes and regulations in totalitarian regimes that censorship always hides itself behind, it keeps deleting its traces because it has to be transparent, and only show the Freedom of Speech of which it is part. There are prohibitions that don't simply determine what they prohibit, but they themselves are

*So speech first needs to be recognized as Speech before it can be free or not, and for it to be Speech it has to be emitted by political beings. There is*

*a well known Aristotelian sentence that says: human beings are political because they possess the power of speech, that puts into common use issues of justice and injustice, while animals only have voice to express pleasure or pain.*

*But then how do we recognize if the person who is speaking is discussing matters of justice rather than just expressing his/her own private pain? Jacques Rancière argues in his text 'The Politics of Aesthetics' that there is a preliminary question to the problem of recognition, which is the properly political question: who has the power to decide what is voice and what is mere noise? Rancière argues that politics is first of all the configuration of a space as political, the framing of a specific sphere of experience: "Politics first is the conflict about the very existence of that sphere of experience, the reality of those common objects and the capacity of those subjects."*

*Plato says that artisans have no time to be elsewhere outside of their work. Obviously this 'lack of time' is not an empirical matter, it is the mere naturalization of a symbolic separation. Politics precisely begins when those who have 'no time' to do anything other than their work, take the time that they have not in order to make themselves visible as sharing in a common world, and prove that their mouth indeed emits common speech instead of merely voicing pleasure or pain.*

*Hannah Arendt writes about*

prohibited. One has to accept them as well as accept that they do not exist as prohibitions.

Then he goes on to tell about a Stalinist story... imagine we are in 1937, Stalin is giving a big speech in Moscow, the crowd claps for some time, then there is a debate, a man from the crowd stands up and argues with Stalin. Everyone is astonished; they wonder 'in secret' how dare he do that – "it is only a matter of time before he disappears". Then another thing happens: another man from the crowd stands up and tells the first man "Comrade, are you crazy, don't you know that we are not allowed to criticize Stalin? This is simply not acceptable." Strange as it may seem, only the second person vanishes. In Boris Groys's introduction of his book *Communist Postscript*, he begins with differentiating between regimes that are based on economical structures and ones that are based on politics and ideology, saying that the economy functions in the medium of money. It operates with numbers. Politics functions in the medium of language, it operates within words – arguments, programmers, and petitions.

Obviously freedom of speech is at the core of the political and ideological, as speech and language are the bases on which that regime functions. Freedom of speech is a claim made in language, and it has to be maintained and protected in language, meaning that this claim

*the 'rightless'; that it is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them; it is not that they are oppressed, but rather that nobody want to oppress them. They fall outside of the regime of justice, or the Freedom of Speech, they are guilty of not being able to be oppressed, not even worthy of being oppressed.*<sup>3</sup>

*Therefore non-political beings can practice the absolute freedom of speech because it is not recognized as speech in the first place, it is noise that isn't recognized by the political structure as speech, and therefore the discussion of whether it can be free or not is meaningless. Their expression of pain or pleasure can't be suppressed, not because suppression isn't practiced upon it, but because this suppression is not seen by the structure of Freedom of Speech as suppression, but as a universal distinction between what is speech and what is not, of what is human and civilized and what is not.*

*In a whispering scream by one of the artists whose work was censored by the Israeli authorities: "Finally, finally they took my work seriously...!"*

*In this sense, the Freedom of Speech is the structure in which speech is either allowed or censored, but this comes after the fact that Freedom of Speech is the structure that recognizes speech itself as speech. Freedom of Speech is the political sphere in which the different elements/subjects try to define and redefine, expand and reduce the*

can only be achieved by maintaining the paradox, the paradox in which language works, the political one. Every word spoken is a political act, and therefore it is either supporting the regime or trying to subvert it.

THIS REMINDS ME OF ANOTHER STORY...

Mohammad was sitting in a mosque when a man came up to him.

"Oh Mohammad, I want to become a Muslim," the man announced. Mohammad smiled and as he was about to explain the process of becoming a good Muslim, the man interrupts: "But first, I have a question."

"Ask, my dear friend!" Mohammad responded.

"OK. If God is able to do anything whatsoever, can he create a rock so huge that he himself can't carry it?" Mohammad, astonished, tells the man, "That's a haram question, friend. Thinking of it could take you straight to hell. Also, I am not the right person to ask. If you wish, you should seek Gabriel. He, of anyone, should know."

The man arrives at the cave where Gabriel usually hangs out. Here he asks Gabriel: "Dear Angel, I want to believe in the one Almighty God, but first I have a question."

*borders and limits to include and exclude what agrees or disagrees with the set of needs and beliefs.*

*Freedom of Speech therefore has limits and restrictions 'in' which it functions, and 'on' which it is in conflict, where the limits are not those of censorship, but rather those that determine what counts as speech. Therefore political struggle isn't about overturning censorship, but rather expanding the limits of Freedom of Speech to recognize what isn't speech.*

*Censorship is an act within the power structure that politically recognizes voice as speech but demands that it is silenced and muted, it refuses to allow this censored speech to be publically known because it threatens the political structure of the Freedom of Speech itself.*

*Censorship is in a sense a mechanism by the Freedom of Speech structure to maintain its power and its ability to define what is to be considered Speech and what is not. Censorship happens within the regime by the one who has power in it; fighting against censorship is a political struggle because it occurs within the political sphere; it is a struggle for justice because it is already a recognized speech that puts into common use the issues of justice and injustice. One can think of institutional critique in the same way as censorship; it occurs within the structures of the Freedom of Speech, its struggle is to make this structure better, more just and more open to*

“Ask, my dear mud-creature,” Gabriel responds.

“Is God able to create a rock so huge, so enormous, that he himself can't carry it?”

Gabriel, astonished, replies: “It's haram to think such thoughts. It can lead you to Hell. Also, I am not the right person to ask. If you insist, I would suggest you ask God directly. He, of anyone, should know.”

So Gabriel takes the man to God.

“God, I brought you this lost soul,” Gabriel tells God.

“God, Mohammad tells us you can do anything you want,” says the man.

“Sure thing, Mohammad is right,” replies God.

“If so, can you create a rock so huge, so enormous, that even you yourself can't carry it?”

God is astonished: “Well, of course, I can!”

And in a blink of an eye God made a huge rock, so vast, so enormous that it mesmerized the entire world.

But...He could lift it!

God tried again, this time creating a much bigger rock, but He could

*noises from outside of itself. It aims to maintain the regime but not to dismantle it.*

*That whispering scream by the artist becomes an essential scream to understand how censorship works. The dilemma of the speechless is that to have their speech recognized as speech means they have to accept the possibility of it being muted, censorship becomes the sign of being recognized as speech, and therefore heard as political. A situation where the speechless kneels in front of the power structure accepting its oppression in order to have his speech recognized as a speech, only to be censored.*

lift this one too! Then another, and another. One after the other. But each one He was still able to lift and toss as He pleased.

The man, somewhat impressed, returns to earth. When Mohammad sees him, he jumps off his seat:

“So? Did he do it?! Was God able to create a rock so huge that he himself couldn’t carry?!”

“Not yet,” replied the man. “He’s still busy trying!”

The dilemma the structure can’t solve is when it has to face itself, confronting its own language. So the only way to avoid it is to take away the possibility of the question.

## II.

In the spring of 2013, I was crossing the Allenby Bridge to Amman’s airport to take a flight to Dubai. (The bridge is the only exit/entry for Palestinians who have permission to live in the West Bank to enter or exit the West Bank). It’s barely a bridge. Although it goes over the dry Jordan river, it is a series of checkpoints and security points controlled by Palestinian, Israeli, and Jordanian police. (Needless to say, the Israeli police force has the overall supervision of all checkpoints. It is the toughest one to pass through, with the most detailed security check

with 4 stops and changes of buses. (In total one changes 5 buses, a process that takes at least 3 hours). Anyways, I don't want to attempt to explain the unexplainable.

Anyhow, once I was crossing the bridge, I reached the hall where we get body searched, and I switched on the camera of my iPhone, intending to document the process. Due to a sudden intuition (fear?), I decided not to, and as I was putting it back into my pocket, an Israeli Soldier jumped at me. Pulling me away from the crowd and snatching my phone, he shouted: "He was filming. He was filming."

I calmed down, and replied that I was just checking the time. Nevertheless they took me to an interrogation room, and their captain came and asked me to unlock my phone and show him my photos. Knowing that I didn't film anything, I had some courage to prolong this situation a bit, just to make them think I might be hiding something. I told them that they are paranoid, and that they have no right to see my private photos. The captain said he was only interested in seeing the last few pictures I took... As I unlocked the phone, he immediately snatched it off my hand Krav Maga style. He didn't find what he was looking for. Feeling victorious I looked him in the eye and reaffirmed what I'd already said - that they are paranoid. The captain looked at me and asked: "but why didn't you take photos?" I was surprised "Excuse

me?” He repeated in a serious tone “why didn’t you take those photos...?” “Because I didn’t want to take any photo...” I answered back... “well” he said “there is no sign saying, ‘No photos allowed!’” I was taken by surprise “So, are you saying I can take photos here?” He smiled at me and said, “I’m not saying anything, I am just pointing out a fact. Now take your stuff and get out of here.” And so I did.

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnzqY7qSzto>.

2. Rancière, Jacques, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Roundtable, Research Architecture, 2006: [online] available at <http://roundtable.kein.org/node/463>.

3. Rancière, Jacques, “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?” in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Volume 103, Number 2/3, Spring/Summer 2004.

## Before and After Censorship

What, How & for Whom/WHW and Etcétera...

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The following text is a revised transcription from the round table *Before and After Censorship* organized by Renata Cervetto and moderated by Lorenzo Benedetti. It took place in May 2015 at de Balie, Amsterdam. The panel was originally made up of Galit Eilat, Etcétera... (Federico Zukerfeld and Loreto Garín Guzmán) and Sabina Sabolović, as part of the curatorial collective What, How & for Whom.

*Renata Cervetto* : Good evening everyone, welcome to this second round table. I will briefly introduce the panel discussion we will have tonight, around censorship and how it may interfere with educational programs, biennials and exhibitions. Our speakers will present some recent experiences relating to this. For this evening, I would like to start with some ideas and questions raised by Manuel Borja Vilel: “Is there an authentic freedom of speech in museums and art institutions? As cultural agents we occupy and use museums as spaces for transformation, to produce displacements and generate new ways of imagining reality. But do museums correspond with the more progressive aspects of contemporary art or have they adapted to market pressures?”

In an attempt to reflect on the bonds between culture and power, this debate will go through different postures and experiences on how censorship may take place implicitly or explicitly, raising questions concerning the unspoken ethical ‘limits’ institutions have and reflecting the lack of autonomy and artistic freedom that institutions, curators and artists may have under particular circumstances. Often this debate goes beyond institutional or artistic endeavors and involves society as a whole. During this evening, we would like to discuss certain questions on the topic of censorship, specifically focusing on the ways that artworks are communicated to the audience. Some of these questions are: What does artistic freedom imply under a predetermined institutional context? How does this framework affect the artwork communication/message towards the public? How do external social groups condition the way artworks are presented to the public? What is the role of the audience in a censorship case? May censorship offer a space for negotiation? If so, how? Let’s begin.

*Federico Zukerfeld* : Hello everyone, good afternoon. We would like to present and introduce our experience in the last São Paulo Biennial. For this occasion we developed a work called *Errar de Deus* [Erring from God], where we established a dialogue with the Argentinean artist León Ferrari. We met him for the

first time when we were all very young, around 18 years old. This meeting was neither in his studio nor an art academy; it was at a demonstration for a human rights movement in Buenos Aires. Despite having many things in common, we had 60 years in between. He started to become a renowned artist when he was already old. Unfortunately the art system in Argentina put him in the freezer for a very long time, and they realized very late how important he was. But for us León was important from the beginning, because we learned a lot from him and as well as he from us, from our generation. León's son disappeared during the dictatorship in Argentina. As a collective, we share with him this painful and problematic history. Even though he was older he played liked a child, he made fantastic artworks with toys, which are more refreshing than many things we see now in contemporary art. Around those years, he wrote a letter to Juan Pablo II, a previous Pope before Francisco, the actual one. He sent a letter to the Vatican asking for the abolition of Hell, which the Vatican of course refused. But he continued in a persistent way and invited us to participate in the campaign for CIHABAPAI *Club of Impios, Herejes, Apóstatas, Blasfemos, Información*. He wanted us to help him to collect signatures to present to the Pope, and we agreed. So from that moment on we started a very good relationship with him and his granddaughters, Paloma and Julieta. In this way we became friends until he passed away in 2013. If you go to Buenos Aires, to Chacarita's cemetery, you will see the grave of León with a cross in the entrance. The paradoxes are amazing in the history of this artist.

So what happened? Two curators from the São Paulo Biennial came to visit us in Buenos Aires and they asked us for a list of interesting people to meet. For us this was great! As artists, to be advisors, can you imagine? We advised them about people we like and people we don't like. Our first person in this list was León, of course, and then Charles Esche became kind of obsessed about seeing his work. But it was difficult to visit the place of someone who died one month ago. His family couldn't go back there, but as we were friends with him they

allowed us to go by ourselves and take the curators with us. Everything was as he left it. We found ourselves making a sort of 'guided tour' inside his house. The curators were surprised to see how much we learned from him as peers, a sort of bohemian education.

The next step was to discuss what to do in São Paulo. We were very open but didn't have any ideas yet. The curators suggested we could do something together with another artist. But the ego and the narcissism of Etcetera... is big! So make something with whom? Maybe with León, but he died, we thought. But the truth is that people like him never die. Our challenge was to keep him alive, as he is a part of us. We took the decision to work with him in a sort of auratic relation. Taking León is not easy; it's taking someone with a big bag on his back. Censorship on his work started back in 1968 with the airplane, his most famous work during the Vietnam War.<sup>1</sup> This was his first censored work, which made him famous in our country. From that time on, every five or six years his works were censored given their content, because he used the figures of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary as icons. He tried to generate a reflection, but most of the time his ideas were misunderstood.

*Loreto Guzmán* : He used to study and read a lot. He tried to connect the history of Colonialism in Latin America with human rights problems. So his reference to the Catholic Church is a way to talk about how the Catholic and Western society was a society of genocide from the beginning in continents such as Africa or Latin America. He combined military airplanes and weapons, with the images of Jesus and the Virgin. So his provocation was not only about the Church but also about what this institution means in our countries, and how it played a crucial role from the beginning of Colonialism, with repercussions that last until today. So for us it was very interesting when Galit [Eilat] and Charles [Esche] suggested to us to establish a dialogue with

<sup>1</sup>. Making reference to the work *La civilización occidental y cristiana* [The Occidental and Christian Society], cast, wood and oil, 200 x 120 x 60 cm, 1965. Collection Alicia and León Ferrari.

León. It was a great possibility for us to do this and connect with this idea of God that León was talking about. That's how we realized that our God was related with the financial capital. We started researching possible work from him that could be reinstalled in the present time, thinking about how we could use it to talk through things that exist, but about which nobody speaks. Especially in the context of São Paulo, which is not so different to that of Buenos Aires.

*FZ:* Let's go back to 2004 for a while. This was the year of the biggest censorship to León Ferrari's work. This was the time when art historians and curators took him out of the freezer and decided to make a retrospective about his work. He was old, but he could do it, and he became like a rock star. In 2004 he had a big retrospective in the Centro Cultural Recoleta [Recoleta Cultural Center], a public institution located in the middle of one of the richest neighborhoods of Buenos Aires and next to the Iglesia del Pilar [Pilar Church]. The problems began when the people working in the cultural center encountered one of the works and got angry after seeing the image of Jesus Christ with insects and things like that. They went directly to the neighboring church and made a claim, which ended up in Jorge Bergoglio's hands. This priest, now Pope Francisco, was at that time Cardinal of Buenos Aires, and he became the biggest adversary of León. His exhibition was shut down after some people from the Opus Dei entered and broke some artworks. At the same time, that censorship provoked a reaction from the so called 'art community'. Many artists went there and showed solidarity with León. This situation brought counterdemonstrations, all the newspapers had the face of León Ferrari in the headlines, he moved from being a contemporary artist to being a prominent figure for national discussion. His exchange with Bergoglio was mediated through the mass media, and the cultural center became a place of daily demonstrations between those for and against his ideals.

After being closed for some days, the exhibition re-opened with a massive audience queuing to enter. Everyone wanted

to touch León, he was all over the media and he became an icon. The galleries wanted to have his works, and everything happened from one day to the other. In 2007, three years later, he won the Golden Lyon in the Venice Biennial. Back in Argentina, he dedicated this prize to [Jorge] Bergoglio for the promotion he gave him, not only in Argentina but also around the world. This was not a cynical comment; he dedicated his victory to his biggest adversary. After this prize León started getting very sick, he was already a mature man.

Coming back to our work, we decided to look for one of León's works that wasn't so well known. He created a *Collage Literario* [Literary Collage] with fragments of different texts, and he finally composed one script. He mixed up Adolf Hitler's biography with some fragments from the Bible; he put everything in one book and said it should be a theater piece one day. So we decided to take this script and generate something new with it, this is how *Errar de Deus* (Erring from God) began.

*LG:* The original book was called *Palabras Ajenas* [Words of others. Conversations between god and some men and among some men with some other men and with god]. There are also conversations among different characters that León tried to combine in the script. One character could be ten (characters) at the same time. In the prologue he explained that Hitler could also be Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary. The construction of this discourse is in continuity. So we tried to create a new script, and we called a very good friend of ours to help us, Franco Bifo Berardi. He has a deep understanding of what the Catholic Church entails, because he lives in one in Bologna and he is a philosopher. We invited him to play with us and make a new script for this new piece in which we decided that God would be the 'Financial Capital'. The question then was how could the Financial Capital speak with men and women? We decided to create a sort of installation in which people could enter into León Ferrari's world. In this little museum we chose to show some works that were important for us. We created a stage, but then the question was how to do a theater piece in a bien-

nial, which is open for three months and has a huge amount of people and students constantly passing through? We spoke with the curators and they said that the education team would be the tool through which to develop this theater piece without actors. So we proposed that the audience should interpret the actors, and the educators helped us in this process.

*FZ:* We distributed the text for the visitors participation in two ways. In one we invited the audience to continue writing the script, and in the other we used cell phone devices. We used technology for the first time, and we got people to actually speak with God, have a conversation with him and write something about this if they felt like it. This is based in León Ferrari's way of working, he used collage a lot, and so we also invited people to play with the current news of Brazil.

The petition for the abolition of Hell is another way of keeping León alive. This is something that enraged the Opus Dei in Brazil. They complained about the work in general, but all the same we could continue with the campaign and this year we will have a personal meeting with our Holiness in the Vatican. Thanks to e-flux also.

*LG:* This Catholic Church is part of a group called *Plinio Correa*. *Plinio Correa* was one of the leaders of *Tradicón, Familia y Propiedad* [Tradition, Family and Property], the ruling ideology during the dictatorship in Brazil. They were the ones who initiated the anti-communist persecution as well. This movement also existed in Argentina and Chile. So for us it was important to remark it was not only about this religious situation, but more about politics. It was a special group of the elite, within the Catholic Church, who manifested against the contents of this biennial.

The biennial also showed part of the Saraus, or meetings with capoeiras from different religions that have partly indigenous and African roots. These groups are completely criminalized inside the country. It was important for us to understand how this criticism of the Catholic Church is present in Brazil.

We saw this with a group visiting from a favela. For them it was very important to speak about these religious staff, which for us was a bit of a shock at the beginning. But then we realized these are unresolved issues that are still going on in many territories.

*EZ*: To finish, I must say that there was also a police investigation. After so many complaints, they went to the Biennial to research the ‘moral damage’; they took pictures of each work and wrote amazing descriptions about them.

*Sabina Sabolović*: Thanks a lot Renata and de Appel for inviting us. I’d also wish there were no reason for having us discussing censorship here, as it would mean that we’ve never had to deal with it in the first place. And in fact this was the case until fairly recently, before the two cases we encountered last year. Before I talk about those two examples I just want to very briefly introduce the context in which we work because I think that is important in understanding how we approached the exhibitions I will talk about.

We are a four-women curatorial collective that has been working together for fifteen years. Our first project *What, How and for Whom, dedicated to 152<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Communist Manifesto* was very much connected to the post-war atmosphere in Croatia, and the violent break up of socialist Yugoslavia in 1991, through which Croatia became an independent state. The 1990s were the times when the public sphere was dominated by extreme right ideologies: nationalism, xenophobia, amnesia about socialist past and a strong anti-communist feeling. All of those were very visible in the field of culture too, especially in the work of cultural institutions that were at the time all state organized.

From the very beginning our work was conceptualized and carried out in clear opposition to this nationalistic representative outlook on culture, and it was imagined as a ‘corrective’ to ossified and non-functional art institutions. Many of the methods used in that first exhibition are still present as a kind

of red thread in our work – such as collective ways of working, partnerships with cultural workers from different fields, reopening and questioning topics suppressed within public discourse, establishing trans-generational and international links. We try to incorporate those also in the program of city-owned gallery Nova, which we have been running from 2003 and which we use as a kind of a ‘headquarters’ for all our international and local projects. The basic structure of the program is very straightforward – a series of solo and group exhibitions, as well as a number of discursive programs such as lectures, seminars and public discussions... On the other hand, the thematic focus of the gallery shifts with time, in accordance with the actual situation.

Gallery Nova was established in 1975, as a part of a Center for Socialist Youth, promoting artists and artists groups within broadly defined conceptual art practice. That was one of the many specificities of the position of cultural institutions in Yugoslavia – the country was not a part of the so-called Eastern block, and its institutions were very much open to experiments and new developments in art, starting with abstract modernism that was the ‘official style’ from the early 1950s on, and continuing with the break up of the modernist paradigm and the introduction of the so called ‘new art practice’ which, since the late 1960s included conceptualism, performance art, artists groups etc. Sadly, this accumulated history that Gallery Nova carries into the present means nothing to the current political and cultural officials, and at the moment the situation with the gallery is highly precarious – it is under a serious threat of privatization, its physical space might be privatized (and turned into a luxurious restaurant or something similar), and there is lack of political will or responsibility to think of the gallery as an institution. We are of course putting up a fight and trying to secure the future of the gallery, but its outcome is very uncertain.

As we already mentioned, for us the local political and cultural context always shaped our international projects as well. This context may be characterized as post-socialist transition,

with its typical manifestations of nationalism and criminalized privatization of public wealth accumulated during 45 years of socialist Yugoslavia, and by post-war normalization that followed the wars in ex-Yugoslavia and whose role was to suppress ethnic cleansing and stolen wealth of criminal new elites. Both of these processes are nominally over, but they continue to shape the political and social landscape.

Our work, as well as the work of many independent initiatives in Croatia with whom we are collaborating, is being formed in opposition to the dominant representative understanding of culture, and the approach that we developed at home. We try to translate this in different social and cultural conditions. It is never really 'about' Croatia – Croatia is a 'symptom', as such detectable everywhere, in different formulations and with different accents.

Until now we have never encountered censorship at home, but I am afraid that this very conservative grip is certainly gaining strength in Croatia, additionally because of the elections we are having early next year. I am not sure if the type of work that we are trying to do will be possible in the future. We'll see...

The actual case of censorship I will talk about happened during *Meeting Points 7*, which is a multidisciplinary contemporary arts festival focusing on contextualised presentations of art from the Arab World, which we curated in 2014 in several cities of Europe, Asia and the Arab World: Zagreb, Antwerp, Hong Kong, Beirut, Cairo, Vienna and Moscow. So altogether there were 7 exhibitions organized over a course of 10 months, with which we attempted to create a continuous narrative with non-linear chapters that continue, digress, take over, complete and contradict each other. That means that it was never the same exhibition – there were certain themes and questions that shifted the focus of each exhibition, but they all sprang from a common source. The exhibitions explored the ways in which a particular selection of themes, clusters of works and artistic positions emerged in response to the specificities and demands of different locales.

The sequence of exhibitions took a deliberate step out of

the Arab World – in terms of the cities where they were held, the list of participating artists and the general stance that was refraining from national or regional representation. This approach had very much to do with timing. The process of organising *Meeting Points 7* coincided with the immediate aftermath of the popular rebellions that shook the Arab World and started in 2011, and also with the rise of various other social movements across the world that sparked an intense public discussion about the existing social and economic system in which we are living.

The decision to move away from the regional representation of the Arab world in general, that I already mentioned, came from the desire to explore the possibilities of rethinking internationalism that would involve an awareness of the mutual conditioning of social battles in different regions of the world. This meant that we wanted to include artists from different parts of the world and to develop the project that will take place not only in Europe and Middle East. This Europe/Middle East is a usual dynamic governed by European foundations financing activities in Middle East (including *Meeting Points*) but in return of course demanding representation of Arab artists and visibility in European cities. We could not completely avoid this reality of course, but we tried to open the project up to other geographies.

The title of the project, *Ten thousand wiles and a hundred thousand tricks*, is a quote from *Wretched of the Earth* (1961), the book revolutionary philosopher Frantz Fanon wrote as a reflection on the Algerian revolution and whose title derives from the opening lyrics of the *Internationale*, the song of the world workers' movement. Conceived as an exhibition in time, *Ten thousand wiles and a hundred thousand tricks* dealt with several interlinked subjects: the role of middle classes today in revolts across different geographies, the forms taken by neo-colonialism, counterrevolution and cooptation, as well as the various strategies employed for countering oppression.

The project started with the exhibition in Zagreb in Gallery Nova, followed by exhibitions in Muhka in Antwerp, Con-

temporary Image Foundation in Cairo, Para Site Hong Kong, Beirut Art Center in Beirut, 21<sup>er</sup> Haus in collaboration with Wiener Festwochen in Vienna. The last venue was Moscow, where we worked in partnership with the V-A-C Foundation (it is a private foundation which sponsors many projects, we met them when teaching in a curatorial school they are organising together with Viktor Misiano) and they helped us find a very specific venue – the Institute for African Studies, a unique location of a working scientific institution which is part of the Russian Academy of Science. The site itself obviously did not lend itself easily to the demands of the white cube. We were quite careful to avoid easy site-specificity that would root the exhibition exclusively in its physical location or the temporality of its scientific, cultural and political roles. Resisting the drive towards nostalgic celebration of international solidarities during the times of anti-colonial liberation struggles and the symbolic capital that the Institute for African Studies in Moscow entails, the exhibition rather acknowledged its own status as a temporary intruder, pushing the agenda of anti-colonialism towards contemporary imperialist grips and class struggles. It took a stance against the revival of Cold War rhetoric and stereotypes, the neo-imperialism of multinationals and international organizations, and the renewed imperial aspirations of states as they play out in present geo-political constellations.

Since the conflict between Russia and Ukraine started at the time of the beginning of our project, we were aware we could not pretend it's not happening. Therefore we hosted an informal assembly of Russian and Ukrainian cultural workers initiated by Russian collective Chto Delat. They also had an installation in the courtyard of the Institute called *Russian Woods* (2012) which came out of their reflection on the protests held in Russia during the winter and spring of 2011-2012. They were unexpectedly struck by the degree to which the conscience of both the protesters and the authorities draws on the reproduction of the mythological ideology of images. And it became important to Chto Delat then to lay bare their

hidden meanings and demonstrate the mechanisms by which they function. So they produced an array of grotesque figures conveying the images of the authorities, society's bugbears, as well as various media constructions of the image of the opposition. The names of the figures are very illustrative – *Oil pump dragon, Oil pump mermaid, Dog-cops, The white house on chicken legs, Church-Skyscraper...*

This was the work that got censored by the director of the Institute for African Studies. When the collaboration with the Institute was being negotiated, it was clear they wanted to know about all of the works in advance and we accepted that. We prepared all the material, including images and descriptions of Chto Delat's figures. But, as the date of the opening was getting closer, the situation with the Institute itself was becoming more and more tense. There were rumours about the Russian Academy of Science being partly dismantled, most of all because of the valuable property they owned. The Institute of African Studies is working in an architectural landmark building of Moscow, 19<sup>th</sup> century palazzo in the city center, and they obviously felt threatened and it was clear they were getting increasingly anxious about our presence. It was a tense working atmosphere that culminated a day before the opening, when the director came back from holidays. He just informed V-A-C foundation that two of Chto delat figures, already installed in the courtyard, had to be removed. It was interesting that he minded only the figure of Lenin mausoleum growing mushrooms and octopus legs out of it, and wild dogs dressed in police uniforms. And the bears wearing church leaders insignia were, not a problem...

We asked for a meeting and insisted that the Institute's staff saw these images before, which was the case. He just said they didn't and made it clear there was no space for discussion at all. When he asked him – are you censoring us then, he replied that censorship can be defined in many ways... Well, that's true. And thus he ended a very short 5 minute meeting. Obviously this was not a case of regulated censorship as defined by law, but rather a gesture of self-censorship taken

as a measure to prevent possible troubles, which in some ways makes it even more insidious. What we did first was to talk to Chto Delat, we were of course taking responsibility as curators but we also felt it was crucial to discuss the situation with the artists and also rely on their sense of the local context. Knowing Chto Delat (we've been working together often for ten years already), we were quite sure they would want to be involved. We offered first of all to cancel the exhibition, which they refused, saying that it is important to show this kind of project in Russia. They were not surprised with this incident, having had these kinds of experiences quite often. What we decided together was that either the whole installation would be removed or the figures that were censored would be covered in a visible way, so that there was a clear mark of the process. We were sure that the director would refuse that, but he didn't. He obviously didn't care about the censorship being visible; obviously his priority was – as he told us in the brief meeting – not to offend Russian people. This was very specific and also outside of the usual rules of the game of the art world reputational economy. On the opening evening we covered the two figures with the black cloth and we added images of them in a guidebook that was given to each visitor. We accepted this censorship, because together with Chto delat we did think that it was more important to have the exhibition happen, both to show their and other works but also not to miss the opportunity to make the public platform between Russian and Ukrainian artists take place at the moment when armed conflict between two states was starting.

Another case I will talk about Renata mentioned already – this was a call for one of the works to be censored (removed) in the exhibition *Really Useful Knowledge* we curated last year in Museo Reina Sofia. The exhibition started from the notion of 'really useful knowledge' inaugurated by workers clubs in the UK in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, to oppose the production-driven education organized by the ruling class. Through this reference to the beginnings of struggle against unrestrained capitalist exploitation, and early efforts towards the self-organized

education of industrial workers, it advocated establishing new ways of reciprocal learning and teaching, and for a re-examination of forms of our social and political organization.

The exhibition presented an array of strategies and methodologies through which artists deconstruct 'common knowledge' and challenge hegemonic views on history, art, gender, race, and class. These ranged from the position of the autodidact and his/her resistance to the authority of ossified intellectual positions, to the various models of collective work aimed at renegotiating and redistributing the power relations in all spheres of life. The use of folk or popular art practice to convey social and communal messages; attempts at reactivating the emancipatory and democratic potential of repositories of knowledge such as the archive, library, and museum; collecting and reorganising images or objects in order to reveal the ways in which images operate; focusing on art's capability to produce imagery able to provoke strong emotional responses and its relation to the political struggle: these were some of the approaches used by the artists taking part in the exhibition.

It was a big exhibition, but the work that triggered the whole discussion was in the end the smallest one. It was a little box of matches by Argentinean collective *Mujeres Públicas*, a feminist collective that has been working in Buenos Aires for a long time. They work with various public actions connected to gender issues and one of the topics they continuously deal with is the pressing issue that Loreto and Federico already mentioned – the fact that abortion is illegal in Argentina (and throughout South America). Within the exhibition *Mujeres Públicas* presented an installation based on the material (posters, leaflets, matchboxes) with pro-choice propaganda that they distribute during demonstrations. Lots of these materials criticize the Catholic Church since it is very much influencing the prohibition of abortion. The work that caused a call for censorship was the box of matches with the image of a burning church, with an inscription 'the only church that illuminates is the one that burns', which is a quote by [Peter] Kropotkin appropriated by Bonaventura Durutti, anarchists killed during Spanish civil war.

The museum had fire regulations stating that matches could not be accessible within the space, so we couldn't distribute them (which was the proposal by Mujeres Públicas) and we anyhow did not want to emulate gestures of demonstration within the museum, so as a kind of absurdly exaggerated white cube display we showed the matches as a valuable sculpture closed in a glass box. The metaphorical fire they started was not on our minds when including them.

Immediately after the opening, in the course of the next day there were 5000 complaint emails on the museum's general email and soon after the two petitions were started by the Association of Christian Lawyers, one asking for the box of matches and other materials from Mujeres Públicas installation to be removed from the exhibition, and the other asking for the resignation of museum director Manuel Borja Vilel for including it in the first place. The whole story was blown up by the tabloids and right-wing media so the petition to remove the works gathered around 40.000 signatures, and the one asking for the director to be fired around 9.000 signatures... The museum completely stood by the artists and by us as curators and they took all the heat from the matches. Their statement said: *"The Museum respects the freedom of expression and freedom of artistic creation, just as it respects all beliefs in the freedom of opinion of the people whose sensitivity has been hurt. (...) but the Museum has never censored nor will ever censor the work of any artist, as an attack against freedom of expression."* We thought the museum's position was more than just professional, it was brave and inspirational how they insisted that it is part of the their role as the museum – not only to show this kind of work but also to provide a space for this type of discussion. The museum also got support from CIMAM and also L'Internationale network they are part of. Here is a quote from that letter, which I think summarizes very well the notion of institutional responsibility: *"The public museum is neither a place for staging harmony in a world that is fraught with conflicts, nor a site for disrespectfully shocking citizens for the sake of avant-garde radicalism. We believe the museum should be a space where questions*

*are posed to visitors that are equally subjects with a critical capacity, open to proposals in the public domain. The best museums should be places where knowledge replaces passive admiration, where judgement displaces prejudice and where agency takes the place of impotence. As a result, society as a whole should vindicate and defend the museum as an essential place where democratic societies not only debate the content of expression – for that purpose there are also other suitable forums – but also the conditions that make this expression possible at all.”*

Unlike the situation with the Institute for African Studies in Moscow, although we of course thought that the censorship should not be allowed here, together with *Mujeres Públicas* we were ready to act strategically and to negotiate or remove the work if the opposite would result in threatening the future of the museum and its leadership, as we really admire and respect artistic, political, educational and emancipatory work that Museo Reina Sofia has been doing. But exactly because of the integrity of the museum, this was not needed.

This piece shared the space with the series of photographs *Art Is Political* by Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge from 1975, which employs stage photography to relate social movements with a field of art. The series combines dancers’ bodies in movement with Yvonne Rainer’s choreography and Chinese agitprop iconography, with each photograph composing one letter of the sentence ‘Art Is Political’. I think this summarizes our position and we have to fight for the right to make this statement active within all kinds of institutional frameworks. As we were already discussing, there is a reactionary backlash happening and we are in the process of losing so many rights, which were won through hard battles, rights like public education, free healthcare, workers rights, and the rights of women... Calls for censorship are part of a very dangerous package and it is our responsibility to resist them, always, and with all available means.



## A voluntary tremor. An interview with Charles Esche

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Renata Cervetto

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The last São Paulo Biennial, *How to (...) things that don't exist*,<sup>1</sup> took place between September 6 and December 7, 2014 in Ibirapuera Park. Before its public opening, the city of São Paulo underwent massive social and political protests. Violence and anger ruled the citizens' mood when the curatorial team formed by Charles Esche, Galit Eilat, Pablo Lafuente, Nuria Enguita Mayo and Oren Sagiv landed in this "urban mass without horizons."<sup>2</sup> During the opening period, issues such as those relating to funding coming from Israel and its boycott, made some of the participating artists take an active position and debate the situation on a daily basis. The curatorial team was fighting its own battles as well, with the Biennial Board on one hand, and with the artists, critics, and social media on the other. Their initial call for conflict was listened to and was responded to from different fronts. However, little was said about how the Educational Department worked under the given circumstances. The lack of understanding and miscommunication between the curatorial team and the local educational staff was especially reflected in this edition. The explicit sexual or political content of some of the works made its mediation a challenge from the very beginning, especially for schools and younger people.

This interview with Charles Esche tries to unveil some of the political and bureaucratic layers underpinning the development of this Biennial, establishing certain parallelisms between how the Brazilian society works and the perspective through which the Education Department was handled. As Head of the Curatorial Team, Esche explains up to what point they were allowed to discuss and put into practice a different educational and artistic approach, and how these statements and decisions influenced the way the works were experienced by a larger audience. Coming back to these issues is an attempt to delineate some of the things that did come to existence before, during and after this event.

*Renata Cervetto*: The São Paulo Biennial has a massive audience, mainly composed by schools. How did you, as a team, deal with the specificities of this particular context and history? What tools did you provide the audience with to be able to engage with the works?

*Charles Esche*: From the beginning we wanted to put the audience in the center. We played with the architecture of the building, which has a monstrous scale in relation to the human figure. So we tried to divide it in a way that became accessible and easy to walk through. We tried to create an agora space, we constructed an island where people in general but mostly students could meet and stay. There were no *catracas*<sup>3</sup>, which is a sort of Brazilian symbol to control space and your body.

In relation to the public, I think that what we imagined at the beginning was very different to how it turned out to be. We imagined we could approach them through the Education Department and also as groups, which we could activate with certain discussions and seminars. We didn't want to provide lots of texts, so we relied more on a verbal interpretation rather than one based on texts and flyers. But that was difficult because of the nature of the Education Department.

What type of educational approach has the São Paulo Biennial?

Education, in terms of this biennial, is in my opinion an incredibly instrumentalized exercise of addressing guilt by the upper class. They see it as something they should have some responsibility for, at least in part, and the biennial is one way they can pay back that idea. They do it only rhetorically, in terms of appearance. For example, as you know, this biennial is mostly visited by schools, which may travel up to four hours to get here. Once they arrive they only have one and a half hours to see everything, or less if they arrive later. It's been known that the kids are asked to go through the *catracas* and then walk out again, so the numbers are counted. That's part of the structure of the institution in a way, and that comes from the Board, who

1. <http://www.31biental.org.br/en>

2. *How to (...) things that don't exist*, Exhibition Catalogue, p. 55, 2014.

3. *Catracas*, also known as baffle gates, are a form of gate which allows one person to pass at a time.

want to prove how many schoolchildren visited the building.

Their view of Art Education is based in terms of a series of existential questions, rather than a politicized series of questions. So art becomes a matter of how we experience the world, how we work or walk, and not why we are walking rather than taking a car. On the contrary, the questions we were asking were more directed towards the rights we might have in the city, and how these rights are reflected in the artistic practice. So there was a real political debate between a sort of existentialism on the one hand, treating humans as equal and focusing on the nature of the body or the human being; and on the other hand our observation of an extreme inequality in the Brazilian society, based on the continual existence of a slavery system which has never been abolished although it is denied. That's a social barrier within Brazil, and the way we would have liked to deal with it was very different to the Education Department perspective. They had more of an experiential idea of art, where you can go through a situation that might fire your imagination but doesn't provide you the tools to analyze it.

Which is an important part of what the works were attempting to do. Exactly, so what we tried to do with the biennial was to respond to the situation from early on. We arrived in Brazil during the protests in the summer of 2013, with the consequences of the elections, the World Cup and the revolts around it. All of these conflicts were articulated in different ways and by different people. The way education is handled in this biennial reflects the way this society works, specifically in São Paulo. It's about bringing these kids up to a certain level but not touching the fundamental system. I think we tried to question that sometimes. In this sense, we faced many problems with the catholic sector and the oligarchy that run the biennial, around the Israeli funding for instance, or the question of religion and its representation. We tried to open these questions up, but it wasn't easy.

How was the relationship then with the Board of the biennial? And up to what point did it interfere with the type of activities you had in mind?

It was complicated, there was an unspoken idea about what art meant for us and for them. We were allowed to work with a certain level of freedom as long as it didn't have any impact on real situations. I think we crossed this border to some extent without understanding that it existed in the first place. The moment we started going into their territory the conflict began.

This makes sense if you take into account the point of departure of this biennial, which is different to the one in Habana or Mercosur for example.

Exactly, and their organizational structure is different as well. But we also wanted the conflict, to show it and work with it.

Some of the works in the biennial were 'censored' for students under 18 years old given their content, could you tell me a bit more about this?

At the beginning, the mediators were there for only two works, to which we agreed but maybe we shouldn't have. Afterwards this measure was implemented to more works, given the pressure of the Catholic sector and the Board. It's also a question of weakness and negotiation, now I look back and I think we could have worked things out in a different way maybe. We continued trying to fight this, but it was complicated, as we were not allowed to negotiate with the authorities any more regarding this issue.

So how could you work with the Education Department having such different ideas and approaches?

As I told you before, there were two completely different analyses of what art is and what's the job of education. They understood it as a personal emancipatory journey that a single child could go on, while we saw it as a tool to transform society on a collective level. We looked at the uses of Art and Institutions, the figure of 'trans', transgender, transition, or transformation. We also set up connections with favelas that they didn't have, so that was also a source of conflict, they had their favelas and we had our own. We basically worked with Mojinho, the last favela in the center of the city, by proposing an improvement in the public environment and creating a circulation around it. In the end we got it through and made it happen.

# HOW not to AVOID EVERYTHING

Francisco Camacho

Art practices cannot operate in isolation from the socio-political and economic struggles that affect society, this, by way of how artworks produce content, as well as where and to whom artworks are exposed. Where the context is adversary to the welfare, art practice should offer a space to discover and propose paths for liberation. It is important to understand the struggle globally and not particularly. In the case that an artist may be detached from the content of their works and engage in political activism in the lap of institutional exhibitions, an extreme result could be the creation of a situation of boycott. In doing so, the artist questions the boundaries of freedom of speech, artistry and illegality, through pointing out ethical struggles, mainly concerning the involvement of the institutions that are making art practice accessible to the public.

Remarkably, when artists want to boycott institutional artistic spaces they criticize the methods used by the institution to construct the art exhibition, by refusing to participate and teaming up with other artists. They also criticize the methods of the institution by campaigning on the grounds of an ethical environment, opening the field to the following questions:

*What is the ethical framework in which the artwork is presented? How does it affect the work and its communication? And how does it compromise the position of the artist?*

Art practice is always compromised, primarily by an economic force and secondly by an institutional arena. This is to say that art practice is compromised by a political and therefore economic agenda. It is therefore very complicated to trace an ethical genealogy. For example, while a government that sponsors an exhibition is in state of war, making artists aware of the unethical origins of the founding, another government is selling weapons to the first one, while yet another government is permitting the exploitation of natural resources to produce the guns and another government that seems to be more ethical is managing the banking resources of the last three.

It is complex to see how this system of ethical values relating to mass production is applicable also to the works made by artists. It is difficult to highlight precisely on what grounds criticism to institutions is based. Equally it is not easy to understand that the economy, as a global phenomena, cannot be challenged based on a single happening or item (aspect – part – event), but that many dimensions need to be considered as global, never as particular.

*How is the presence of this economic turmoil manifest in the artworks made by artists?*

The artist's contestation should be global and, probably most importantly, should start by engaging art practice independently from the institutional umbrella, if possible. I would like to address the controversy generated by the opening of the first *Salon des Refusés* (Refused Artists' Salon), which took place in Paris in 1863 by command of Napoleon III. This was a remarkable episode because it exemplified a desire to generate autonomy thus exposing artistic ideas in order to challenge the hostile environment, criticizing the institution with its unclear and unethical atmosphere around exhibition making. The event led to the creation of an association of artists who organized an annual exhibition parallel to the official salon with the motto: 'no jury no awards'. Every artist member of the association could show any work of art without judgment and with complete freedom. Artists like Édouard Manet, Gustave Courbet and Camille Pissarro were refused participation to the official salon, and remarkably these artists were amongst those considered most important during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The unofficial character of the *Salon des Refusés* is a very important factor in understanding the evolution of visual arts and its social content during a period of many political struggles, making the work of art not only a witness but an active actor. By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, these associated artists were considered revolutionaries, their works a statement in them-

selves. I want to highlight here that this ‘revolutionarism’ was based on their works and not on their political positioning, even if it can’t be said that their works were devoid of political ambition.

It seems that in our times, artists look to reflect and dissociate whenever there is a spot for struggle with the institutional organization. I say ‘associate’ because they want to direct attention towards the ethical behavior of the institution. At the same time, however, I say ‘dissociate’ because the strategy is neither by creation or artistry nor by finding a constructive way to expose their works and make this process open to the public, but mainly opposite to this, by boycotting, canceling or trying to close the proposed spaces, or even withdrawing.

Parallel to the Salon, Courbet was an active politician who, as an artist, took part in the events of the *Commune and the Restoration*, being Deputy at the City Council<sup>1</sup>. At first glance, it seems that his political ideas and participation in political life are not reflected in his production. However, one can say that his *oeuvre* is a claim for a new order in society and a continuous critique of the establishment. The relation between art and politics in a work of art is a very important point to treat. Up to what point is the political idea more privileged than the artistic idea, and the artistic idea an illustration of a political agenda?

There is always friction in attempting to capture, with clarity, the aim of a work of art that is politically based. When is it mere activism? Or when it is a work that questions the material interest of art as a ‘*social question*’? Following the questions above, I would like to propose to analyze the concept of proselytism in relation to the idea of marketing, or to say, self-promotion.

Historically the term proselytism meant to convert, becoming in modern times a term used to describe the action of obliging people to engage with beliefs or political ideas in ways that are not ethical. Whilst actions taken by artists are

<sup>1</sup> Ten-Doesschate Chu, Petra (ed. and trans.), *Letters of Gustave Courbet*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992.

closer to proselytism than to artistic creation, not aiming to attract others or to make tangible the economical and political ambience, artists seem to pursue other ends that could be self-promotion, and self-empowerment. They do this by using inappropriate tactics to convert or convince, rather than allowing people to make a free choice: cutting 'the revelation of man manifesting his individuality and his moral and physical independency.'<sup>72</sup>

In such cases, the public could very well consider these forms of boycotting very close to proselytism in politics. Boycotting can be considered inappropriate because an institutional art show is open to the public and it is not clear how or if the message of this artist can influence public opinion. In the majority of the cases, the limits of these actions relate to the problematic of what is considered moral or not and this varies from person to person. The act of trying to convince others of what a group considered unethical, is therefore out of the arena of art practice, and rather tends towards the direction of forming a political speech. Again, the question is why these artists do not make this ethical statement visible through their works of art.

Is this idea of exploiting the political speech of the institution a marketing strategy for a group of artists who want to highlight their political aspirations over their own art production? By analyzing this question it is possible to say that probably these artists want to indoctrinate the public and make visible things that most probably are known by everyone.

In addition, such manifestations are meant to make visible manipulative attitudes by the market, economy or political spheres to the open spaces of art practice. However, it is a big question why artists decide to use manipulative attitudes and start a political agenda instead of using their art practice to reply and direct attention to the public. I suggest that these strategies are against the freedom of the public to define

<sup>72</sup> Ten-Doesschate Chu, Petra (ed. and trans.), *Letters of Gustave Courbet*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992.

whether or not the institutional space is beneficial or detrimental. The following statement may sound judgmental, but trying to affect the course of an art show is a chaotic and even despotic act, while the artist that does so, wants precisely to fight chaotic and despotic regimes. This leads to no creation at all and is against the principle of making bold social statements with the medium of art practices. One of the most powerful aspects of art is that it enables a physical and mental space to propose conflicts but also possible solutions.

Ain't Gonna Play - Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Clare Butcher

‘...nah nah nah nah nah naaaah  
Ain't gonna play Sun City...’<sup>1</sup>

These words mark the chorus and title of a song co-produced by Artists Against Apartheid released late in 1985. The music video begins with a splice of promotional footage set to a soothing samba-rhythm, flying us into the heart of Baputhatswana – one of the so-called ‘homelands’ where black South Africans were relocated following apartheid’s Group Areas Act. Here in the dusty hills we find an oasis of luxury and faux-tropicana on the rolling lawns of the Sun City casino complex. While unfortunately not the only example of a white-owned business which took advantage of the homelands’ exceptional economic and legal status, Sun City had become, at that point, a symbol of the gross disjunct in South African internal and external affairs – it was indicative of apartheid society’s “‘right’ to entertain itself in any way that it wants to, to basically try to buy us off and to buy off world opinion”, as Danny Schechter, a journalist at the time recalls. Despite calls for not only an economic but also a cultural boycott on the country, wealthy clientele and famous artists (Frank Sinatra, old blue eyes, being one of them) continued to perpetuate a sense of privileged normalcy. The sultry soundtrack is soon interrupted however as news images of the Sharpville massacre, demonstrations and arrests overwhelm the screen, backed by Miles Davis’s first haunting notes of the awareness-raising tune.

I was born that same year. Not in South Africa, but close to it. Knowing little of what was happening just across the border, my experience of the far-reaching implications of cultural and academic boycotts on apartheid South Africa has been at a remove of almost two decades (perhaps merely a blink in institutional years). Combined with the distance that geography and colonial history bring, any perspective on the efficacy,

<sup>1</sup> *Sun City*, 1985, written by Steven Van Zandt.

or should we say the possibility of boycott here, needs to be refracted through these somewhat hazy lenses. This is not to say that there cannot be a shared conversation, a collectively negotiated set of terms, in which to discuss the question of confining, postponing, removing, withholding art institutional practices. But, and there is always a but, as the late, wise artist, curator and teacher Colin Richards reminds us, all these practices involve

*[...] an exercise of freedom in a constrained, heavily administered world. That freedom (of expression, movement, action) is local and historically situated. Censure and censorship are both decisively institutional and situational...What freedom means remains fragile and fugitive, and suggests [an] ongoing state of emergency.*<sup>2</sup>

With the Sun City song still ringing in people's ears, it was a group of established South African artists that now had to consider the consequences of visibility in regard to the country's pavilion in the 8<sup>th</sup> Valparaiso Biennial in 1987. During this period, the apartheid government had created ties with Pinochet's regime in Chile, making the exhibition inextricably entangled within this web of diplomatic, economic, and ideological threads – as most exhibitions are – despite the claim that the Biennial was non-political. And, as we know, “invisible ideological strings only remain so if they are not strained too far.”<sup>3</sup>

A public statement was issued by the artists saying that while they denounced “politically repressive systems wherever they occur”, they accepted the invitation of the Biennial on the basis of their own personal ‘merit’ as artists and would therefore be representing themselves and not their country on the condition that their work and texts go uncensored.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>. Colin Richards, ‘Curating Contradiction’, in *The Global Art World*, p.331.

<sup>3</sup>. Most of my information surrounding this event and its critical responses is based on Colin Richards's article *Feeding the hand that bites: South African art and the Valparaiso Biennial of 1987*, online: <http://asai.co.za/feeding-the-hand-that-bites-south-african-art-and-the-valparaiso-biennial-of-1987>

<sup>4</sup>. Statement published in the Valparaiso Biennial VIII Catalogue.

There are a number of issues thrown up by this statement as well as those who stated it. And it wasn't the first time, nor the last, that these were raised in relation to Valparaíso and elsewhere. Class privilege, race, representability, voice and access to the big picture of these respective 'situations', all play to a different tune – a tune that is often quite different than that of the fragile, fugitive, exceptional space of art – it's last line, a quote from Jean Renoir's 1939 film *The Rules of the Game*: "The awful thing about life is this, everybody has their reasons."

A slight shift to the right, if we were looking over a large map, and by some strange triangulation, I found myself in São Paulo in October 2014 listening to echoes of that haunting melody which wound their way through the voluminous halls of Oscar Neimeyer and Hélio Uchôa's 300,000m<sup>2</sup> Bienal pavilion. Several weeks earlier the 31<sup>st</sup> Bienal de São Paulo had opened, but only just, following a number of events which led to 61 of the show's contributors proposing to withdraw their work due to the representation of a particular logo on sponsorship walls, on (and) offline publications, as well as press materials. This logo – like all the logos bedecking not only the entrance hall of the grand pavilion but also each expansive floor of the show – presented a dilemma of varying proportions for those involved as, due to the Bienal's move away from the national pavilion model in 2006,<sup>5</sup> and the subsequent pooling of funds (which should have meant that all artists could benefit from the same support regardless of their country's economic status), they would all have to 'bear the burden' of certain patronage.<sup>6</sup>

It had been quite a summer. The city of São Paulo facing a major water crisis and over the undrinkable waters, Gaza was ablaze with 'Protective Edge' operations. The Brazilian gov-

5. The 27<sup>th</sup> Bienal de São Paulo, chiefly curated by Lisette Lagnado, and was entitled *Como viver junto* (How to Live Together).

6. Certain quotes in the following text are extracts from interviews conducted by Eloise Sweetman and myself with the Bienal's curators, members of staff, artists and educators in the context of a research trip made by the *School of Missing Studies*, October-November 2014. I'm incredibly grateful for the generous, honest insights of those who agreed to speak with us – even in the thick of things.

ernment had in fact recalled its ambassador to Israel, to which Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesperson Yigal Palmor offered the following: “This is an unfortunate demonstration of why Brazil, an economic and cultural giant, remains a diplomatic dwarf.”<sup>7</sup> Brazil’s arguably respectable ‘diplomatic dwarfism’ grew out of its boots soon enough however, as handshakes were had and Israeli financial support for cultural activities in Brazil reinstated, including Bienals.

With some of the artists’ projects already a year in production, the signatories – who’d rallied shortly and sharply in a series of fevered private meetings to discuss the ‘normalising’ of this particularly fierce moment of decades-long conflict through white-cube-whitewashing<sup>8</sup> – risked the loss of budgets in a potential ‘breach of contract’ with the Bienal, as well as the support of a broader network of gallerists and collectors. For some, withdrawal wasn’t even a question, as their being seen to be supported by such a source would have put them in danger in their home countries. And for others, such as the many local artists, educators and staff members involved, the case, while particular in its conditions, was capable of heaving into view a structure of Brazilian sponsorship who receive substantial tax breaks for their contributions to the event, not to mention a kind of image cleanse by association; as well as the Bienal’s difficult diplomatic history as the world’s second oldest recurring international exhibition.

Initiated by one of Brazil’s foremost industrialists at the time, the Bienal de São Paulo was established in 1951 to place Brazilian art, which had supposedly hovered at the “margin of the global elite,”<sup>9</sup> on a global stage, while framing it within a

7. See: <http://www.jpost.com/Operation-Protective-Edge/Brazil-recalls-ambassador-for-consultations-in-protest-of-IDF-Gaza-operation-368715>

8. The meetings were initiated by the artists themselves and the curators of the exhibition were not asked to be a part of them. The curators were in fact contractually bound to support each funding application made by the Bienal foundation. And while some applications were not actively pursued the curatorial position in this case gives new meaning to the notion of ‘between a rock and a hard place’. The announcement of curatorial support for the artists’ statement can be seen: <http://hyperallergic.com/146308/sao-paulo-biennial-curators-join-artists-in-repudiating-israeli-sponsorship>.

context of internationally recognized modern art. This formation of external diplomatic relationships through exhibition did not mirror the making of an internal cultural dialogue between the bourgeois, or as it is translated directly from Portuguese, the ‘elite’, cultural scene of the metropole and those on the Brazilian margins (not necessarily geographic peripheries but also historically imposed ones). The complex political background, against which the Bienal has been set, brings this tension into stark relief, even now.

During the Military Dictatorship – which lasted from 1964 to 1985 – the Bienal continued to be an event, with mixed success. In her book on *Brazilian Art Under Dictatorship* (2012), Claudia Calirman describes the more or less *laissez-faire* attitude of the government towards the works shown in the Bienal, particularly as artists moved (safely) towards abstraction and ephemerality. However, with the demotion and detention of many of the country’s critical thinkers and practitioners following the Institutional Act No.5 of 1968 (e.g. president of the Brazilian Association of Art Critics, Mario Pedrosa to name just one), as well as the undulating critical attention of the art world that such events received, the constraints of the Bienal seem to have remained somewhat unmoved.

The co-sponsorship of the right-wing military regime, earned the event the nickname of the “Boycott Bienal”, as international petitions were signed – “Non a la Biennale de São Paulo” in Paris in 1969 – as well as open letters published prompting others to abstain from the Bienal – see Gordon Matta Clark’s open letter in 1971 highlighting the ethical consequences of such an implication. Interestingly, these responses by individuals and groups of artists did not seem to affect the support of various diplomatic bodies such as the British Council, who continued to participate, albeit quietly, throughout the regime’s period of power.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>. ‘Introduction’, *50 Years of Bienal de São Paulo*, 2001.

<sup>10</sup>. I’m very grateful to Isobel Whitelegg for her mapping out of this chronology in her article *The Bienal de São Paulo: Unseen/Undone (1969-1981)*, in *Afterall*, Autumn/Winter, 2009.

The vacuum created by such indignant refusals left some of the Bienal editions ‘filling space’ by including more regional artists. A backhanded, though complex gesture, allowing local artists a privileged visibility nonetheless. The advent of a number of other experimental institutional endeavors in the surrounding city and in other parts of the country however show that one cannot judge the state of contemporary Brazilian art under boycott solely by its evidence within the Bienal. And the silencing erasures of the state of emergency taking place around white walls pertained not only to words but also to images.<sup>11</sup>

The further censorship of the 31<sup>st</sup> Bienal cannot be unseen outside of this legacy – the main site of conflict within the walls this time. While an agreement was finally reached between the bienal board and the artists just days before the opening – resulting in the addition of the line “The institutions below only support the artists from their respective countries” – the logo in question was seen to be not only symbolically but physically protected by two security personnel during the inauguration (fragile and fugitive indeed).<sup>12</sup> Other writings on the wall began to appear in the month following. Having received over 4,000 complaints about the ‘appropriateness’ of certain artwork content for the Bienal’s younger public,<sup>13</sup> the Bienal curators were approached by the police and asked to fill out affidavits on each of the offending pieces. Subsequently a warning sign was placed outside works with provocative titles such as, Miguel A. López’s *God is Queer* (2014), those with ‘subversive’ content, particularly relating to gender as seen in Hudnilson Jr.’s xerox paradise *Tension Zone* (1980), or representing a certain kind of violence, made explicit by

<sup>11</sup> See Colin Richards, *Feeding the hand that bites: South African art and the Valparaiso Biennial of 1987*, online: <http://asai.co.za/feeding-the-hand-that-bites-south-african-art-and-the-valparaiso-biennial-of-1987>

<sup>12</sup> An image of which reached meme status when released by Tony Chakar on hyperallergic.com

<sup>13</sup> This ‘younger public’ consists of approximately 25,000 school students who are bussed in, sometimes from three hours away, on state-sponsored trips, to see the Bienal as an essential part of their cultural education.

Ines Doujak and John Barker's *Loomshuttles, Warpaths* (2009-).<sup>14</sup> The sign consisted of an exclamation mark inside a triangle, bidding viewers under the age of 18 to be advised by Law 8,069 of July 1990.

For the 250-strong Bienal education team – a dynamic, self-organized group known as the *Educativo*, who actively responded to the inner turmoil of the edition – this posed an interesting dilemma for their multiple tours per day. Rather than playing to the tune of the constraints, which legally barred their charges from seeing about a third of the show, the *Educativo* introduced what they called the *Proibido* [prohibited] tour. On this route, student groups were, as usual, taken to as many works as possible. However, when approaching a prohibited piece like Etcétera's *Errar de Dios* [Erring from God] (2014), the tour guide would send the group's teacher in to see the installation and report back to the students what they found.

This kind of 'report back', the anecdote, is what we rely on to tell these unofficial stories. I swear I saw (or didn't see) this. And while these yarns may become the matter of future histories<sup>15</sup> – weaving solidarities between these specific instances and a larger, dare we call it 'communal' discourse of care – the stakes of such a conversation, such a conversion, are indeed high, invoking images of 'glass houses' and 'planks in ones own eye'. It's perhaps no coincidence that we return to moral metaphors in attempts to find some score or script for the hazy decision-making processes which ultimately define our public practices – expressions, movements and actions – and...

<sup>14</sup>. A project which has stimulated further conflict in art institution-public relations as seen in the case of MACBA, Barcelona: <http://art-leaks.org/2015/03/19/the-exhibition-the-beast-and-the-sovereign-that-should-have-opened-today-at-macba-has-been-censored-barcelona-spain>

<sup>15</sup>. I'm indebted to Jan Verwoert's text *On Future Histories. And the Generational Contract with the No Longer and Not Yet Living and the Pan-Demonium of Irreverent Styles of Nostalgia*. In van der Stok, F., Gierstberg, F., Bool, F. (eds.) *Questioning History: Imagining the Past in Contemporary Art*, 2008, Rotterdam: NAI Publishers.

*perhaps nothing less than the preservation of what many of us  
take to be worthwhile in culture,*

*communal and (not or!) individual. We accept the challenge  
of doing this in a world of 'difference',*

*a world in which we can take very little for granted. Irresponsible  
or ill-considered actions could end*

*in discrediting those very practices we value, and by extension  
ourselves...<sup>16</sup>*

<sup>16</sup>. Colin Richards, *Feeding the hand that bites: South African art and the Valparaiso Biennial of 1987*, online: <http://asai.co.za/feeding-the-hand-that-bites-south-african-art-and-the-valparaiso-biennial-of-1987>

If art is located where  
it appears not to be,  
then where is art? And,  
consequently, if  
education is where it  
apparently is not, then,  
where is education?\*

In mediation interests what is (not) mediation:<sup>1</sup>  
on certain Cloud Formations

Mônica Hoff



*Mediation Lab: Atmospheric phenomena and weather conditions in the context of mediation, 9<sup>th</sup> Mercosul Biennial, Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, 2013. Event led by curator and educator Valquíria Prates. Photo by Eduardo Seidl/indicefoto.*

A cloud is the visible assembly of droplets deriving from the evaporation of the planet's water that is found suspended on the atmosphere. After it is formed, it can be moved by the wind. If it is thrown upwards, the cooling of the water particles is imminent. On the other hand, when the wind forces it downwards, it tends to dissipate. There are many kinds of clouds and each one represents a body of atmospheric actions and answers. It might be high, medium or low. Solid, liquid, or both. Horizontal or vertical. Of a delicate, silky or fibrous aspect. It might be thin or thick. The cloud is, at the same time, a vehicle and a subject of the weather; it is language in its own contingency.

A cloud is, also, the name given for a network space where one can store, access and share information, independent of where this storage originated.

A cloud is, therefore, a type of un-hierarchical space that remakes itself all the time. Hence, it is a good metaphor for an education program.

*Cloud Formations* was the name we gave to the education program of the 9<sup>th</sup> Mercosul Biennial,<sup>2</sup> which occurred in Porto Alegre in 2013.

1. The title of this essay refers to, and proposes an inter-semiotic game with the poem *Interessere* (1976), by Décio Pignatari (1927-2012), a poet associated with Brazilian Concretism. In the poem, through semantic manipulation – “in life interests what is not life and in art interests what is not art, in science interests what is not science...” – the author creates a strategy of rhetoric denial in which, by denying certain conditions he ends up affirming them even further. See PIGNATARI, Décio, *Poesia Pois é Poesia: 1950-2000*. São Paulo: Ateliê Editorial, 2004.

2. The Mercosul Biennial is a major show of visual arts, which has been taking place since 1997 in Porto Alegre, in the South of Brazil. The Biennial's 9<sup>th</sup> edition took place in 2013 under the theme and title, *Weather Permitting*. The proposals of the 9<sup>th</sup> Bienal do Mercosul | Porto Alegre were to identify, propose and repurpose changing belief systems and appraisals of experimentation and innovation. It intended to raise ontological and technological questions through artistic practice, object making and nodes of experience. That edition of the biennial could be considered an environment in which to encounter natural resources and material culture in a new light. The 9<sup>th</sup> Bienal do Mercosul | Porto Alegre was curated in three components: the exhibition Portals, Forecasts and Monotypes including existing and new work, projects created through collaborative commissions, performances and screenings; the initiative *Island Sessions*, involving field trips, discussions and an online publication, and the program, *Cloud Formations*, designed for teachers, mediators, and the curious. The 9<sup>th</sup> Mercosul Biennial curatorial team was composed by Sofia Hernández Chong Cuy, artistic director and chief curator; Mônica Hoff, ground curator and head of *Cloud Formations*; Raimundas Malašauskas, time curator; Bernardo de Souza, space curator; and curatorial cloud fellows: Sarah Demeuse, Daniela Pérez, Júlia Rebouças, and Dominic Willsdon.

*Cloud Formations* was a kind of informal education and integrated platform for the public and diverse agents that ontologically interconnected – mediators,<sup>3</sup> educators and a curious public – that, in practice, are often understood as distant publics. It lasted 8 months – from May to November of 2013 – starting before the opening of the biennial and ending with the closing of the exhibition; and it was designed to generate an educational program that integrated different publics in ways that were horizontal, critical, and non-instrumentalizing, creating and forming itself as a large network of encounters and discussions that were decentralized and fully integrated with each other, so that this ‘network’ could also work as the mediator course for the 9<sup>th</sup> Biennial.

In order to enable this network training, the program was structured in 2 interconnected networks: one network focused on activities carried out at a local and regional level – called the *Land Network* – and the other focused on activities at the national and international level – called *Cloud Network*. Among the activities were: trans-disciplinary public lectures led by artists, curators, mediators, educators, researchers and people from the community; mediation labs, comprising theoretical and practice-based encounters in different places throughout the city of Porto Alegre – auditoriums, public parks, botanical gardens, parks, on the street, subways and buses, and also via the internet – focusing on the collective construction and critical sense of mediation in art, education and in everyday political practice; residences for mediators in schools, research laboratories, community centers, cultural institutions and family farming, recycling and bio-architecture cooperatives aimed at exploring forms of inexact and irregular kinds of knowledge via inter-, multi and trans-disciplinary dialogues; as well as projects called *Field Conversations*, *Tides*, *Home School of Inventions*, and also the International Symposium: *Someone*

<sup>3</sup>. Mediators are one of the terms used in the Brazilian context of art to designate monitors, educators or people contracted to offer guided tours of an exhibition. In general, they are students of art. From the fifth to the ninth edition of the Mercosul Biennial, strategically they were students and graduates in different fields of knowledge.

*Who Knows Something...and Someone Who Knows Something Else: Education as Encounter and Equality*,<sup>4</sup> a public debate focusing on the places of knowledge production and the production of discourse that took place simultaneously in 20 different spaces (schools, museums, town squares, studios, gardens, café shops, bakeries, bus stations, etc.) throughout the city of Porto Alegre.

The first project, *Field Conversations*, consisted of a series of study trips to different parts of the state in order to decentralize the 9<sup>th</sup> Biennial not only spatially, but also conceptually, leaving the narrow field of art to understand how processes generated in other fields could also move and affect people, generating fundamental questions for art and its ways of being. This activity also aimed to reverse the logic presented in the latest editions of the Mercosul Biennial, in which the project was heading to inner cities, taking their methods and technologies in order to ‘train’ educators from other communities. At the 9<sup>th</sup> Biennial, the intention was the opposite: to bring people from the capital and metropolitan areas to meet and learn from other communities.

The second project, *Tides*,<sup>5</sup> could be considered both as an artistic commission conceived by the three artists-educators and as a laboratory. Coordinated by these artists, it was focused on dialogue and shared construction of the meanings of art and education with educators from different cities in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

And the third one, *Home School of Inventions*, was an artistic commission proposed to the 9<sup>th</sup> Mercosul Biennial by the mediators. It was a free school based on one of the exhibition venues and worked as a mixture between an office, an invention workshop, a laboratory, and a library with an open and public agenda. The commission aimed to create a pilot project to discuss with teachers, students and visiting public the meaning of school – what it is, what it should be, and what is meant by the term “school”, and whether to identify this project as

4. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUGUCi51XdI>.

5. See <https://vimeo.com/100283094>.

such. Over the 59 days of school many people participated and offered informal activities, discussions, research, conversations, artist-in-residence programs, improvised seminars, planted some spices, made huge soap bubbles, made test bands, performed workshops, or just sat a little to rest.

Four issues were fundamental to me during the conception of the education and public programs.

The first was: what do I do when I do or think I'm doing curatorship? And, what do I do I when I do or think I'm doing an educational curatorship?

The second was: what happens if the power over the conception of the curatorial project is diverted to other agents? And what happens if the power over the discourse and the building of narratives, in the case of the biennial, takes place outside of it?

The third was: if art is located where it appears not to be, then where is art? And, consequently, if education is where it apparently is not, then, where is education?

And the last one: in reality, what do I want to know? Because the whole project, more than a curatorial project or a job, was an intense learning process.

To me, the main issue and the one that comprised all those questions was: what in the education process of the Mercosul Biennial, throughout the years, constituted, in fact, education. In my understanding, in that moment, the sense of education carried out by the biennial was directly related to a process of self-miseducation, in other words, to the creation of autonomous zones for the production of knowledge and affection within the biennial that exceeded the structural normatives, policies, narratives and concepts of the institution itself. This took me, then, to the most traditional (and contradictory) action of the biennial: the mediator's course.

Originally conceived as a primarily rear-guard action, the mediators course was not designed in fact for them, but rather to ensure a good public service to the public-spectator of the biennial and, especially, to satisfy the interests of the institution itself. In other words, it wasn't about a course *for* medi-

ators, keeping the understanding open in terms of what this function could be, therefore allowing to collectively build and problematize it, but *of* mediators, i.e. of a minimally capacitated workforce necessary to answer the institutional demands in relation to spectators, partners, sponsors and community, without any autonomy or narrative power.

Obviously, this is not a model exclusive to the Mercosul Biennial. On the contrary, this logic is still a common place in terms of the relation undertaken by much of the art institutions and museums with their education programs, even (or mainly) when their discourse aims to avoid that.

There are however, at least 3 problems in this argument. These were problematized by the biennial, changing the institution from within. The first is considering that mediation is a service; the second is thinking that a course can bring out a mediator – as an academy can form an artist; and the third, considering that the mediator doesn't exist without a previous institutional formation, in other words, that it is the result of the demands of an environment and that, therefore, must serve it, thus constituting an institutional function.

Considering that, in the context of *Cloud Formations*, more than asking ourselves what a mediator does or must do, we asked ourselves who are they and what are their narratives. And more, if 'in mediation interests what is not mediation', what is mediation then? What exactly are we doing or hoping to do when we mediate? And above all, what in fact do we mediate? Techniques, biographies, art history issues, artistic intentions, curatorial concepts, pedagogical models or (also) affection, common information, informal knowledge, stories, criticism, suspicions, astonishment, perceptions, political positions, doubts? Wouldn't that be the production of knowledge in its highest potency? If yes, what differences could there be between my intellectual and/or poetic production as a curator and the mediators' intellectual and/or poetic production? Why is it that one type of knowledge should be visible, while another would correspond more to the discursive expectations of mediation? And finally, how can this be put into practice?

How can one take an education project generated by different people in a de-hierarchized format and allow it to have its place and, at the same time, open breaches in the institution?

In an unofficial sphere, this movement was already happening at the Mercosul Biennial. Especially throughout the last decade, the mediator course exceeded the institutional measure and gradually changed itself into a kind of autonomous zone – of knowledge, affections and narratives – generating important and new ways of thinking and moving, as much from a poetic, pedagogic viewpoint as from a political one, within the context of the biennial, and outside it as well. The urgency and the punctuality of the ideas and proposals presented by the mediators began, therefore, to compose much of the Biennial's education program, especially through actions and activities dedicated to the community and the exhibition audiences.

In the face of that, in 2013, it seemed urgent to extend such methodologies and thoughts to the education program as a whole, in such way as to place them at the foundation of the overall approach to education for the 9<sup>th</sup> Mercosul Biennial.

Thereby, the mediators' training changed from a training aimed at the forming of qualified recruits to deal with the visiting public of the exhibitions, into an experimental laboratory of critical mediation in real time, without the 'before and after' of the exhibition, in a continuous project in which there was no difference between what was performance and what was training.

*Cloud Formations* had, as one of its main premises, the decentralization of the power related to the production of knowledge not only theoretically but mainly politically and poetically in terms of the formation of the discourse and the artistic and educational practices that involved that edition. This represented, therefore, a twist in the structure of what until that moment was understood as education within the Mercosul Biennial context.

In this way, by proposing the mediators course as both the education and public programs of the 9<sup>th</sup> Biennial, I wasn't just

stating that ‘in mediation interests what is not mediation’, but mainly reaffirming, in so many words, that in mediation interests above all what mediation is.

“The way we speak. The way we are.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>. An expression taken from the *Manifesto of Pau-Brasil (Brazilwood) Poetry*, published by Oswald Andrade in 1925. That manifesto is the first in a series of manifestos that were responsible for presenting the aesthetic notions that came to guide modernist artistic and poetic production in Brazil, deeply informed by Andrade’s notions of anthropophagy (cannibalism) – a metaphorical and symbolical ‘eating’ and ‘re-formulation’ of other European and colonial cultural forms and practices. By writing: “Language without archaisms, without erudition. Natural and neological. The millionaire contribution of all the errors. The way we speak. The way we are,” Andrade was telling us of the many errors and deviations that make up the ‘formation/training’ which constitute and characterize us. In the context of this essay, it serves as a metaphor for the meaning of education constructed throughout the Biennial’s trajectory. See Oswald de Andrade, *Manifesto da Poesia Pau-brasi*, In: ANDRADE, Oswald. *A utopia antropofágica*, São Paulo: Globo, 2011, p. 59-66. English translation Stella M.de Sá Rego. *Latin American Literary Review*, Vol 14, No.26, Brazilian Literature (Jan - Jun 1986) pp 184-187, p.185. (Accessed March 2015).



*Home School of Inventions*, 9<sup>th</sup> Mercosul Biennial,  
Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, 2013.  
Photo by indicefoto.



*Field Conversation: From the Earth to the Body,  
From the Body to the Earth, 9<sup>th</sup> Mercosul Biennial,  
Montenegro, Rio Grande do Sul, 2013.*  
Event led by agronomist and researcher Flávia  
Charão and psychologist Paulo Gleich.  
Photo by Liege Ferreira.

When artworks resist mediation – some approaches from performance to the educational field –

Renata Cervetto

“Art is not here to make the world better, it is here for us to possibly formulate the world otherwise, to stop us from continuing doing what we know how to do.”<sup>1</sup>

I have recently encountered a series of performances that made me rethink how mediation works, or could work, within art institutions. Before going into some concrete examples, I would like to pause on the term ‘mediation’. If we consider how words evolve in the artistic medium, the person that develops this task was first known as a ‘guide’, turning into an ‘educator’, and finally, as its commonly expressed nowadays, an ‘art mediator’. If we have a closer look, we may notice that the main two verbs in these ‘pedagogical’ actions – to guide/educate on one side and to mediate, on the other – are almost opposite. The act of ‘guiding’ could be understood as a demagogic way of transmitting knowledge, implying an unequal point of departure, where there is one person who knows (about art in this case) and the other who doesn’t. This idea is still prevalent; some audience members consider themselves ‘ignorants’ regarding artistic matters. On the other hand, ‘mediation’ seems to pursue an equal relation between the viewer and this easy-going person wondering in the museum’s agora; who, rather than *guide* the visitor into certain spatial/conceptual directions, will look for an informal conversation whilst having, as a point of departure, the artwork in front of them. *Guides* usually have a background in Art History or Museum studies, while *mediators* might also be philosophers, architects, scientists, historians, or any other discipline that may expand the frame of this exchange between the visitors and the artwork.

“Responding to artworks, we rehearse attitudes towards

<sup>1</sup>. This phrase is an oral quote from Mårten Spångberg during Jaques Rancière’s presentation in de Balie, Amsterdam, 25 March, 2015.

anything that matters,” argues the American art critic Peter Schjeldahl.<sup>2</sup> Writing is one possible way to do this, but when one faces a work or is part of a certain artistic project developed over time, another type of response is at stake. When we think about the consequences of mediating certain work, the response we may have as a visitor is partly triggered by a question, by recalling past and personal experiences, and by linking ideas we never thought could be related. This is how we can make sense of a work, to appropriate it, and to be able to add to it an extra layer of meaning. Then we can rely on it to understand certain ideas, contexts and even problematize other aspects outside of its frame.

But how is performance then associated with this? Through the following examples, I would like to reflect on what happens when one applies or combines this medium with the act of mediation. Performance can be developed in multiple ways and contexts; it interacts with a certain space, objects, and most importantly, other people. What then if regular ‘guided tours’ could become ‘guided detours’? How might applying performance to educational innovation transform the production of knowledge that takes place in/outside an exhibition? In 2006, Pablo Helguera proposed the term ‘Transpedagogy’ to refer to projects by “artists and collectives that blend educational processes and art-making in works that offer an experience different from conventional art academies or formal art education.”<sup>3</sup> In these types of proposals, the pedagogical process is at the core of the work, and although he uses it to speak about socially engaged practices outside the institutional frame, I would like to consider it in relation to this new type of *applied* performance with pedagogical means. One may argue that there’s some redundancy in the concept of ‘performative mediation’, as the artist Bernardo Ortiz says, all pedagogical acts are performative, they don’t just present a discourse but re-present it.<sup>4</sup> But then, it would be about taking this performa-

<sup>2</sup>. Schjeldahl, Peter, *Let’s see. Writings on Art from The New Yorker*, Thames & Hudson, 2008.

<sup>3</sup>. Helguera, Pablo, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, Jorge Pinto books, New York, 2011.

tive quality of mediating to an extreme, and conceiving it from a different perspective while retaining the goal of communicating certain knowledge.

When tracking down these types of projects, performances like *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* may come to mind. For this work, the American artist Andrea Fraser interpreted Jane Castleton, a proper and fitted museum guide who took visitors through an unusual and passionate *derivé* around the Philadelphia Museum of Art. This character first appeared in *Damaged Goods Gallery Talk Starts Here*, which took place at The New Museum of Contemporary Art of New York in 1986. For the first performance, Fraser intentionally satirized the role of a guide or volunteer, as she puts it. Through Jane, her character, she depicted with irony and sarcasm the archetype of a voluntary museum guide with the aim of infiltrating her political and social ideas regarding the role of a museum and its function towards the public: “(...) the Museum will provide a ‘training in taste’.”<sup>5</sup>

Another example by the same artist could be *Art Mediation*, a series of thirteen wall texts commissioned by the Austrian insurance company EA-Generali Foundation as part of *A project of two faces* (1994-5). These texts are now presented among other works of the Foundation’s collection in the Museum of Modern Art in Salzburg. Here, Fraser appropriates again another mediation channel to share part of her research on the potential function of art in a corporation. The texts present anonymous excerpts based on interviews conducted with the members of the Board and main executives of EA-Generali Foundation. One of them reads: “We want to give them [the employees] the opportunity to develop, not only professionally, but also as human beings (...) we do that by offering contact with culture through art in our corporate headquarters (...) this should give (...) employees the feeling that we are not only

4. Helguera, Pablo, “Transpedagogy: contemporary art and the vehicle of education”, in *Pedagogy in the expanded field*, Fundação Bienal de Artes Visuais do Mercosul, Porto Alegre, 2011.

5. Fraser, Andrea, *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2007, p. 98.

pressing them for professional results, but consider them as something more: as human beings with a certain intelligence.” These texts were originally displayed in the building, where the employees could easily access them. Although this was not a performance, Fraser challenges the institutional logic by revealing, to the museum’s visitors or the corporation’s employees, the implicit manipulation they go through. In all of these works there is a strong but disguised institutional critique that is being articulated through the scripts and the panel texts, not only referring to museum power structures but to the logic that undergoes any type of institution where hierarchies and personal interests may delineate tensions between the parties involved.

The more recent examples I would like to consider are *By Burning We Obtain One Gram of Powder*, a performance by Katarina Zdjelar with Philip Ewe, Hannah Dawn Henderson, Vasiliki Sifostratoudaki and Anne-Marie Twigge during the exhibition, *Father, Can’t You See I’m Burning?*.<sup>6</sup> The other one is *Retrospective*, by Xavier Le Roy, presented since 2012 in different international museums. I will refer to the one I saw in the MoMA PS1, New York, in November 2014. Both works are completely different in the way they present themselves and interact with people. The first one was ongoing and unannounced, based on a script but mostly improvised; the second one was conceived by a choreographer and developed by dancers, taking into account the special context an exhibition space provides for the exchange between them and the visitors as different to a theater.

*By Burning We Obtain One Gram of Powder* started with regular meetings between the curators, the artist and the performers where they got acquainted with the exhibition concept, the spaces, theoretical material, the artworks and each artist’s proposal. All of these references were used to develop a flexible script that they would change and adapt according to the

<sup>6</sup> *Father, Can’t You See I’m Burning?* (27 April – 15 June, 2014) was curated by the participants of the Curatorial Programme 2013/2014 of de Appel arts centre, Amsterdam.

circumstances. They were always present as a group, roaming the exhibition rooms together with the visitors. They discussed and spoke in loud voices about the rest of the works, inventing rumors, making jokes, standing in exit doors and even fighting. They appeared and disappeared into the crowd, turning the exhibition space into a field of contestation. They did the opposite to what a regular guided tour might do, they went from one place to another without any clear guideline, or stood next to one work for the whole day and spoke about it, combining facts with fiction and their own ideas. Their dialogue, as that of Jane Castleton, was also a strategy to touch upon a similar type of critique towards art institutions and the inherent power structures underpinning them.



By *Burning We Obtain One Gram of Powder*, 2014.  
Performance, de Appel arts centre.  
Photo by Cassander Eeftinck Schattenkerk.

Xavier Le Roy, with a background in microbiology, approaches choreography in an expanded way. His idea of what a retrospective implies leaves aside the classical linear narrative of events, possibly documented by videos or pictures, to experiment with multiple time axes that zoom into his body of work, created between 1994 and 2010. He does this by repeating a choreographed sequence split into 3 moments, performed by a different group of dancers in each venue. When you enter the room as a visitor, you may find the dancers standing still, close

to a wall representing an excerpt of the choreographies, or lying on the floor. Suddenly, after a mutual sign between them, the dancers start running in opposite directions and some of them leave the exhibition room. Here begins what Le Roy calls 'individual retrospectives', where the remaining performers address the visitors individually and narrate their personal stories in combination with excerpts of Le Roy's works. The third moment is achieved by the accomplishment of a new piece, which is developed throughout the exhibition period. This work changes every time, as the group of performers is most often local and speak their own language. Entering the room allows the audience to discover Xavier Le Roy's pieces through subjective stories narrated and performed by the dancers. The experience lasts as long as the visitor stays in the room, and the dynamic is repeated over and over, having the possibility of engaging with different dancers every time. In other words, Le Roy deconstructs the elements of what a retrospective can be and reconfigures them by incorporating elements from his own field. This hybrid work can be taken as a valid alternative, through which to enter an artist's work, process and way of thinking, without the need of external information provided by wall texts. The content here is not about institutional critique as in the previous cases; performance here is used to reconfigure an exhibition category and to provide multiple entries into an artist's work. An important part of what is communicated to the audience is mostly dependent on the performer and his own subjective way of interpreting Le Roy's pieces.

From Andrea Fraser to this last example we may see different ways of entering the mediation field from a performance-based approach. In the first case, Fraser explicitly appropriates the role of a museum guide in order to inform the visitors of certain things that may be overlooked or directly omitted by a regular guide. But she also indirectly plays with the expectations of the audience, who participate in a guided tour in order to get information about certain 'artistic' objects, but fail to consider who decides they are 'artistic' in the first place. Zdjelar's performers leave aside the role of the guide,

embodying instead the role of the visitor. Their voices are not attempting to instruct but to confuse the audience through comments, stories and rumors about the works. One could decide to follow them or just listen to them as a collateral effect. Their ambiguous and slippery presence attempts to generate an awkward feeling among the visitors, who can be disoriented or distracted by them while seeing the works. Le Roy's piece doesn't take any particular role in the mediation process. His proposal has more of a poetic layer in that sense, as the performers, sooner or later, surround the visitors and indirectly invite them to share a private moment where their personal stories are told in combination with a brief re-enactment of Le Roy's works. The audience in this sense not only gets to discover his past pieces but also becomes part of a new one.



*Retrospective Xavier Le Roy, 2014.*  
 Photo by Matthew Septimus.  
 Image courtesy of the artist and MOMA PS1.

In these three cases the performers and dancers act as 'indirect' mediators; the type of information they provide, and their way of doing it, is far from the notion we may have of an effective guided tour or regular mediator. By taking these examples I would like to think mediation otherwise, maybe as a strategy to dismantle clarity from the beginning, retaining

certain ambiguities and making the potential audience question the information they are receiving. It's about communicating with a different logic and medium that allows the visitor to be involved as part of the work. What these works also share in common is that they were not conceived necessarily from an educational approach, as one possible activity joining the exhibition's public program. Mediation here might be seen as an indirect consequence of the work's development, and not the original goal in itself. In her essay *Why Mediate Art?*,<sup>7</sup> Maria Lind calls for a different type of mediation, meaning that most of the pedagogical methods and approaches we are familiar with have been shaped from a Modern way of looking at art. She argues in favor of developing strategies that help us engage with, and think through, contemporary art instead. I also think it would be interesting to see if and how art institutions may manage to produce dissensus through their mediation and curatorial strategies, and detect the methods they employ to keep an ongoing platform of debate that can reach beyond the 'confirmed believers' of the artistic medium.

7. Lind, Maria, "Why Mediate Art?" in *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating*, Jens Hoffman (ed.), Mousse Magazine #28, April 11-2011.



Some thoughts regarding Lesson 0, an ongoing attempt  
to develop a curatorial project about art education focusing  
on alternative educational methods

Juan Canela



*In Residence,*  
Jaume Ferrer in Instituto Dr. Puigvert.  
Performance in collaboration with the students.  
Photo by Merce Gaya.

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The following is a transcription of Juan Canela's presentation at the symposium *Surrounding Education. Towards new integrations with the Curatorial and Artistic fields*, 6-7 June 2015, TAAK, Amsterdam.

I will try to explain *Lesson 0* to you. It is a project I have been working on in the last years, which is now reaching its end. This is a curatorial project developed together with Ane Agirre, a curator from the Basque Country, with whom I sometimes work together as the curatorial duo Azotea. This is something common in my curatorial practice, sometimes I work alone and sometimes with other people.

The project deals with art and education in a broad sense, and more particularly is about non-standard ways for communicating artistic knowledge. It is held at Espai 13 – Joan Miró Foundation, which is a particular place in Barcelona. This is an institution founded by Joan Miró in 1975, with the purpose of hosting his work, but also to be used as a research place where other contemporary artists could develop their projects. What is interesting for me about this place is that they have this touristic side about Miró paintings and then you have also another temporary exhibition program, mainly focused in contemporary art, and then they have Espai 13, which is in the basement of the foundation. There they work with more experimental contemporary art and young artists, engaging with the local context. They usually invite a curator each year to develop a series of exhibitions there.

The project begins to take form when we started having some conversations with Martina Millà, Head of Exhibitions in charge of Espai 13. Talking about different issues, we always ended up talking about artistic education. This was four years ago. One day she asked us why don't we do something about this topic? We are two curators, not teachers nor educators. But there were some issues that got us thinking about art education, as for example the disappearance of artistic training in formal education. There are increasingly less and less artistic lessons in high schools and universities. On the other hand, we have this 'growing up' of professional artists and curators around the world, schools, Masters, etc. Also we thought about how art schools or artistic education in the last years has become closer to the art market. This is how we started to articulate the project. Then we thought about what we could

do regarding artistic education, thinking we should develop an exhibition program in an institution. We wanted to work with different times and formats, to use the exhibition space but not only to have exhibitions. Even if we believe in them, we wanted to test other possibilities, involving Barcelona's artistic education context in the project, understanding artistic education in all its complexity, from artistic pedagogical projects and the pedagogical turn, to the urgencies in formal education. So we didn't only want to invite some artists working with the subject we proposed, nor did we want only to have exhibitions to think and reflect upon, but the aim was to involve other kinds of professionals, working actively on these things also. Given some institutional reasons we had to postpone our program. Instead of doing it in 2013-14, it happened in 2014-15. In the meantime, we wanted to start working with the other people with whom we were already collaborating and start testing some ideas. In that way we agreed with the institution to start one year before the exhibitions in order to make some specific activities related with the project. In this sense we could test some ideas and formats, and invite some people with whom we wanted to work. It had a lot of different activities and collaborations. When we started, we were still thinking about how this project should be and started doing some activities. While we were doing this, we were also thinking and deciding at the same time, like an open code. In this way, our previous activities helped us to articulate the project. We tried to take this invitation to do an exhibition program and to expand it more and collaborate with other projects and people.

We worked with collectives from Barcelona and abroad, such as Studio 5 at Seccio Irregular. We also did a two-month residency in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It was a research residency in Museo La Ene. I was interested in the context of Buenos Aires for artistic education because I knew it from before as being very different from the model in Europe. Education there is more informal; you have clinics with Tutor Masters and younger artists attending them for years. You also have other educational proposals, such as the Art Department

in the Universidad Tocuato Di Tella, developing a more international educational program but at the same time keeping the structure of the clinics. I made many interviews with curators, school directors or educators, such as Inés Katzenstein, Director of the Art Department at Universidad T. Di Tella; Alicia Herrero, Director of Lipac; Rodrigo Alonso, curator and university teacher; and Paula Bugni, Coordinator of CIA Centro de Investigaciones Artísticas (CIA) [Centre for Artistic Research] among others. At the end of the residency we held a conversation with some artists who had passed through different places in Buenos Aires to talk about their experiences in common problems, differences with other contexts, and proposals for the future.

We also collaborated with A\*desk, and did a workshop with Nora Sternfeld, a curator and educator from Austria. She was one of the people we were reading and listening to, and for us this workshop has been really important in the sense it influenced the way we later developed the exhibition program. She did a workshop called *Exhibitions as contact zones*, where she understood the exhibition as a social space in which different agents come together and act. The way she addressed it and how she managed to engage people in the conversations and discuss and doubt everything was very inspiring.

[ *Question from audience* ]

*Who are the participants of these workshops?*

Well, in this case the participants were art students and general public. General public in this kind of workshop implies artistic public, so artists, curators, etc. This was something we were asking ourselves a lot. Who are we talking for? Who are the people we want to talk with and how we can do that? As I see it now, for us this was a training, to think about how to do these things.

Finally, in September 2014 we started with the exhibition project in Espai 13. As I said, we wanted to think about alter-

native and non-standard modes of transmission for artistic knowledge. Normally in this space they do 5 exhibitions per year. We decided to make 4 and with the remaining budget elaborate a pedagogical mediation program. We wanted to take the ideas that artists were working on and place them in the artistic educational arena of Barcelona. We decided to invite some mediators from the city who we already knew, and who have an extended and deep knowledge of the educational context of the town. We invited Aida Sánchez de Serdio, who was working in the university until 2 years ago, and she invited Cristian Añó and Rachel Fendler. Together they created the *Friction Pedagogies* mediation team. So we were working in an institution with 4 exhibitions and a mediation team. The Fundación Miró already had an educational team working there for 30 years, but from the beginning it was really important to engage with the pedagogical team of the institution and work in collaboration with them.

Another important thing for us was the working method we wanted to implement regarding the pedagogical mediation team, the artists, the institution, and us as curators. The mediation team joined us from the very beginning when we started the conversations with the artists. It was an attempt, as we spoke about yesterday, of blurry power relations, to try to modify them in some way. We wanted to use the space not only as an exhibition space but also as an organic one, where things could actually happen. The project in itself has not only a display area but also performative activities, not only related with the exhibition. All the parts are equally important.

The first exhibition was with Priscila Fernandes. *The Modern School* is a pedagogical project that took place in Barcelona at the beginning of the 20th century. The main element of the project was this book: *Y el Arte?* [What about Art?] So in order to make it also present in the space, Priscila came up with the idea of transforming the exhibition space into a classroom. Then we had these posters where all the activities taking place in the space during the time of the project were announced. We organized a teacher's course, in collaboration with Con-

sorcio de Educación. We had around 30 teachers attending the course; they came every 2 weeks for this. It is important to remark that the temporality of the activities was not the same as the exhibitions; each dispositive has its own temporality. During this period we also had 2 open sessions together with the teachers and general public. The decision of taking Priscila's project to question high school teachers was actually because she was working with a school. So we invited different people from Barcelona working with different methods of education with the aim to reflect on the urgencies of art education in the school nowadays. The first panel was titled *Pedagogical Alternatives and the School* and the speakers were Inter-Accions, Institut Quatre Cantons, Centre de recursos pedagògics llibertaris - Josefa Martín Luengo, and Assembla Groga. The second panel was titled *Art Education, Creativity and Contemporary Working Methods*, with Sinapsis, Jaron Rowan, El Martinet and Creadors en Residència. It was very interesting to bring these people together, and look at the frictions that created. In the first session, it was some alternative educational models, such as Inter-Accions, a self-organized study program initiated by some students in the university, Institut Quatre Cantons, a very open and innovative high school in Barcelona; or Assembla Groga, a group of mediators working in libertarian pedagogy and a member of the movement for social rights in education against financial cuts. A number of frictions were brought up during the discussion; for example, the member of Assembla Groga pointed how an alternative public high school, such as Quatre Cantons, is possible due to the commitment of the teachers investing their time and effort, and living in a precarious position. Or the different position of the libertarians, who want to work in a self-organized way outside of the official system, but being aware of their position, and thinking at the same time about how libertarian and anarchist thinking can contaminate the public school from the outside. It was clear that we needed to advance in different fronts, coordinating efforts and working from the differences towards a more open and diverse educational model in the school. One of the

members of the libertarian group told a story of a little child he met in an anarchist school in Extremadura (South Spain) and, talking about his school, life and friends, he told them “yes, I like my school. But I have friends from authoritarian schools too.” Then they asked him, “oh! And what is an authoritarian school?” and he answered, “it’s a school where you have to ask for permission to go to the toilet.”

The second exhibition was by Rita Ponce de León, a Peruvian artist living in Mexico. It was a totally different project and exhibition. She proposed this installation, where she divided the space in two with this strange fabric membrane and objects and drawings hanging from the ceiling. The objects came from a conversation she had with a friend of hers over a long period of time. She drew a lot during the conversations, and these objects are important moments in the life of this other person. She understood the exhibition as a space that you can shape. In the explanation of the exhibition it was not specified what these objects were. The idea was that visitors could make their own exhibition with them, not only symbolically but also manipulating them. It was a really strange thing. We thought about how to make people touch the objects and play with them. We did a poetic poster trying to suggest the dynamic, but surprisingly people played with the objects a lot. In this second exhibition we worked with high school students. Some of them were already working with Miró Foundation Educational Department. Friction Pedagogies created this clue game working with the objects in the institutions that were not artworks. Many interesting things happened in this exhibition. For example, with this group I was talking about how they could play with the objects. We wondered how far they could go with this game, could they paint them? Mutilate them? Originally we were concerned about whether people would dare to touch them, but not how far they could go with them. So they stole one of the figures, without telling us, and then they wrote to Rita and ourselves saying they had this little figure. They started to make a lot of things around it. They even built some friends for him.

The third project was In *Cycling Mode: The Wilson Exercises* by Anna Craycroft and Marc Vives, curated by Rivet. They have been working in this project called *Wilson Exercises* for 2 years now. It has to do with taking the notion of exercise and of habits and bring that to the artistic sphere. Each of them works on their own projects but they share a lot of research and knowledge. We invited them because we liked how they sort of erase the borders between curator and artist. In the exhibition at Espai 13, each of them was working on their thing but you could feel some connection between their works given the long conversation they have been having. The works on display at Espai 13 are a translation of what happens when exhibition experiences are brought back into the individual studio and are confronted anew with personal working methods. Throughout, the curators put their analytical gaze on hold in favor of responses in an associative and fictional voice that engages with aspects of the artists' material.

And just now we are working with Friction Pedagogies on the *Dodgeball* project. Related with Anna and Marc's exhibition, we decided to open up a discussion on the training of artists through a dialogue between the circumstances of learning settings and the diverse working environments that make up contemporary artistic practice. We are asking people related with art education to make two short videos, where they state how they see the art education field nowadays. We ask them to imagine an exercise to be developed by teachers or students that could actually be developed. Later we will make a working meeting to discuss these proposals and make a little publication with all these exercises.<sup>1</sup>

The last project is by Eva Kot'átková. She is working with the notion of ambidexterity, and she is interested in how you can bring this free utopia that artistic education sometimes has, and how this works inside the institutions and structures that host it. We started the program with the open and dynamic classroom of Priscila Fernandes, and we finish with

<sup>1</sup>. <http://pedagogiesdefriccio.hotglue.me/dodgeball>

this installation that transforms Espai 13 into a room halfway between a broken-down classroom and a place of art education, invoking a creative as much as a destructive force. In this case Friction Pedagogies takes a conscious turn to examine the role of the museum as an educational device. It plans to explore the part played by the Educational Department of the institution and its relations, in order to go beyond the critical dialogue found in the public arena, and thus explore performative forms and debate narratives.

The collaboration with *In Residence* was a really interesting process. This project gives an artist the opportunity to work in a high school over the course of a whole year with the same students. With Jaume Ferrete we arrived with a lot of ideas to work with, but then we realized that the students don't want to be at school, they didn't care about what we were talking about at all. We wanted to reflect on authority, to give freedom and be very open. But they only wanted to go home, they didn't want to be there. This has been a struggle for us, what do we do? Go home with them? They were a very challenging group of thirteen year-olds in a peripheral neighborhood of Barcelona. So we wondered what sense did it have to bring an artist there for all of this time. But finally with this group we realized we couldn't just stand there and talk to them, so what we did was to invite a lot of people to make different kind of activities, leave the high school and go to other places to make things. They wanted to do things, not to listen. What we did at the end was a performance action, once a week during 1 month, having some public each time and making an ongoing performance in the gym.

The other residence that we did, with Lúa Coderch, in another high school, was very different because the teacher and the group were more proactive. For this project we also collaborated with Tàpies Foundation, who invited the students to make a radio program. During the first part of the year, the artists in residence had discussions with the group about what kind of things they like to do. At the end they came up with the idea to make this time capsule. They divided themselves into

groups, to make both time capsules, and things to put inside. We buried this capsule in Miró Foundation and we will open it in twenty years.

The project ends with a publication, which gathers all the texts and graphic material generated by *Lesson 0*, expanding the project into editorial format. Alongside all the documentation, texts by Nora Sternfeld, Luis Camnitzer and Chus Martínez will generate a theoretical frame. In addition, we will also publish the book *Diario 0* (54 metaphors collected as documents), an intervention as a fanzine by artist Antonio Gagliano, involved in the whole process of the project. He wants to document the informal knowledge, feelings and emotional folds circulating within the community involved, creating a sequence of pictures that are mostly metaphors that come from interviews with people involved in the various project activities. This functions as a vocabulary, to replace anything that tries to communicate issues that often get blurred or hidden, and provide another layer of knowledge and understanding about these two years of work.



Second panel of the teachers course organized by Friction Pedagogies, *Art Education, Creativity and Contemporary Working Methods*, with Sinapsis, Jaron Rowan, El Martinet and Creadors en Residencia. Espai 13 Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, 2014. Photo by Pere Pradesaba.

*Dynamics of exchange: on collaboration and communities.*  
An interview with Sofia Olascoaga

Renata Cervetto

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In the following interview, the Mexican artist and curator Sofia Olascoaga embarks on a personal journey through which she tracks how she became acquainted with the notions of collectivity, community and collaboration. Interrogating the limits of curatorial and educational labels, Sofia experiments on the integration of theory and practice in many different ways. Her passion for organizing platforms of exchange and discussion took her through many self-initiated projects and institutional positions, which she shares here together with her questions and personal-collective memories.

Renata Cervetto : You attended an Art Academy, but how and when did you start working between the artistic, curatorial and educational fields? How do you relate to them in your own practice?

Soffia Olascoaga : During primary and secondary school I went to a Freinet school, which is a particular pedagogical approach that involves different forms of group dynamics, collective organization and learning through practice. There was a strong emphasis on the creative process and artistic expression, such as writing, theatre, music, or drawing.

Later on, I studied at La Esmeralda, the National School of Painting, Sculpture and Engraving in Mexico. I had been previously enrolled in Psychology, Sociology, and International Relations in other universities. I was always between a creative practice, and a focused interest in social studies and political theory. While studying art, I felt the need of a stronger theoretical framework to reflect upon social and political issues that were simply not discussed at La Esmeralda. When I studied Sociology, the case was the opposite: I felt the need for a more creative environment and subjective reflection.

La Esmeralda had limited theoretical input, when I studied there the Director had invited a group of emerging and upcoming artists to teach. They had been related to initiatives such as Temistocles 44, an artist-run space in Mexico during mid 90s, and also to Taller de los Viernes [Friday's atelier], which took place at Gabriel Orozco's studio. Curiously enough, when one entered art school during those years, there was little awareness of an international contemporary art scene. By that time Kurimanzutto had recently opened, and later on in 2003 Gabriel Orozco was present at the Venice Biennial, inviting many of these artists to a curated show. This group of artists was gaining visibility and becoming active on an international circuit and started bringing books and catalogues to the classes, that were hard to see otherwise. The energy to teach and share new content, practices, artists, references was stimulated mostly by them and not so much from as part of the academic program itself.

At school, there wasn't a common space to meet, speak

or share informal talks on a daily dynamic, not even a cafeteria. It was troubling to see so little exchange among peers, besides the parties that happened later, there was almost no dialogue about what was going on artistically, or politically in our context. So together with other colleagues we cheaped-in and bought plastic chairs and tables, to sit down and be able to maintain ongoing conversations, we got donated books for the library, these type of things. This was also the beginning of the war in Iraq, but as nobody spoke about that we bought newspapers and put them in the classrooms to trigger some sort of debate. It seemed all very naïve, but interestingly troubling and provoking.

When I was about to finish art school in 2006 I was invited to propose a public program for Celda Contemporánea, a non-profit gallery project founded only a couple of years earlier, by curator Sol Henaro at the Universidad del Claustro de Sor Juana, a private university in Mexico City. She proposed a very active space, with an ongoing and strong program based on specific lines: the first reviewed conceptual artistic references, mainly recovering focus on artists from the 60s generation who were often blurred by the booming generation of contemporary Mexican art abroad. Artists like Melquíades Herrera, Ulises Carrión, Juan José Gurrola, Alberto Gutiérrez Chong, among others. There were also a series of exhibitions by mid-career artists, and special commissions to develop site-specific projects, a documentation center with portfolios and a printed matter project.

When I got Sol's invitation, I was already influenced by collective ways of working and decision-making, having had previous experiences with my friends and colleagues at art school, as an auto-learning experience and countering the voids of academic structure, we went through organizing independent projects, shared studios and public interventions.

It was discomforting for me to see how at school and also at the emerging art fair scene, and young galleries, there was a prominence of a highly individualized image of the artist, and of artistic production itself. I was, however, clearly interested

in group and collective artistic experiences in Mexico, and troubled by the fact that at these topics were very seldomly approached or even accesible.

What was your proposal about?

My proposal was based on a discursive platform called *En conjunto: ¿grupos colectivos o colaboraciones?* [Working Together: On Groups, Collectives and Collaborations]. A series of public debates with over 25 artist initiatives from different generations. While it was not a historical analysis, I was interested in intergenerational dialogue. I was supported by historian Francisco Reyes Palma to delineate a certain chronology, with the artists and groups actively working since the early 70s, through 80s, 90s and 2000s.

The 70s was a crucial moment in Mexico's art scene, through the activities of what has been called *La generación de los grupos* [The group generation], where critical initiatives developed as a response to post 1968 political climate in Mexico and world wide, questioning repressive regimes through Latin America, war in Central America, Vietnam, through public interventions and interrogations of the institutional artistic system. For example, Grupo Suma, Proceso Pentágono, No-Grupo, Taller de Arte e Ideología, El Colectivo, among others. Among a very wide spectrum of groups and languages, some artistic groups worked frequently on public space strategies, urban interventions, political manifestations, and artistic proposals against institutions through performance.

During the 80s and 90s the situation changed. Artistic groups were mostly engaged by creating the first artist-run independent spaces, such as La Quiñonera, Temistocles 44, or La Zona. Another type of politicization was being developed, with closer ties to rock music and the underground scenes. There was also a proliferation of artistic languages associated with installation, performance and fanzines.

At the beginning of 2000s, groups began to call themselves 'collectives', they emerged from art schools and people who worked together, using new media, festive gatherings, internet,

stickers, DJs. Many times these groups didn't have an explicit political discourse. Such as Bulbo, Atlético, Bordermates or Mutante.

Another session focused on pedagogical approaches to artistic education with an emphasis on collective production. This was taking place at a series of free artistic schools located in Mexico's peripheral areas founded by the Mexico City government, called FAROs (Fábricas de Artes y Oficios) which were ran as community centers and challenged Academic artistic training. But also, at an art school project in Merida, Yucatan, led by artist Monica Castillo with the local government.

Another session addressed curatorial and research collectives. With the idea of showing not only artistic collectives but also curators working in groups, and independent research projects. Initiatives such as Teratoma, an independent curatorial program founded in 2003 by Olivier Debroise, Pip Day and Cuauhtémoc Medina; or 'Curare', which was one of the most important curatorial projects in Mexico that worked as an archive, a journal, a space for criticism and writing and at some points an exhibition program. Projects like *Pinto mi raya* [I draw my line], an independent archive project initiated by Mónica Mayer and Víctor Lerma. They started by doing a press archive on media coverage and critique of Mexican art, organized by categories such as performance, public art, art and feminism, groups and collectives, among others.

How were they organized?

I organized 7 sessions in total, I asked each of the 25 collectives that took part in the program to speak avoiding the presentation of artworks, and focus instead on the analysis of their group work, the experience and the process of working together. An art historian, critic or curator moderated each session and I was insistent in inviting external people to generate a discussion. We asked questions like; how was the collective process of decision-making? What was the advantage of working together? And how were roles assigned and work divided?

How were funds provided or generated? How was the work and process documented? Is there an archive? By mid 2006, there were scarce publications, articles or documents which approached these practices. In the very few available texts, the part of the group's experience was always absent.

I wanted to respond to a personal and generational need to develop collective initiatives but facing the lack access or knowledge about what had happened in previous decades. I believed this was a dialogue to be generated as a live event, a gathering, an intergenerational debate.

One of the side purposes was to provoke a meeting point for art students from private and semi-private universities, and public art schools, who had little to none communication, even when they were part of a potentially close community.

So which was your next step with this research?

I kept reflecting and questioning where my insistence on communities and collaboration came from. I realized my school experience had been a very strong influence, and also the fact that I spent my childhood in a community project developed by my parents and other families in Cuernavaca. Until then this was only a blurred anecdote for me, but suddenly the origin of my interests became clear. I needed to go through a personal process in order to recognize what were the events that shaped this community experience, to recreate it through my own memories and others.

Soon after I finished these sessions, I was invited to run the Educational Department of the Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil. Until that moment I hadn't questioned myself about the implications of education in a museum, or an institution. What does it mean to think as a community on relevant topics that are not necessarily included in certain Art History narratives? Or how might one shorten the distance between living contemporary artists and potential audiences interested in their processes, and viceversa? I was interested in organizing things but not necessarily from a curatorial perspective, as I don't give so much importance to these classifications. My main concern

was how to generate meeting places where different voices, communities, generations, and professions could engage and find new ways of confronting their ideas. To consider when and how it's necessary to stop reproducing the conventional discursive rituals we are used to multiply, in art, institutions and at the academy.

But going back to your initial question, I noticed a certain tension within this embroidery between art, education and curatorship. The institutional organization is set up through a departmental division, this fact generates a series of tensions on what is delimited as curatorial, educational, and so on. In so many museums the departmentalized roles internally assigned, restrict and even contradict the potentiality of a contemporary art museum as a place of thinking, and learning, as a pedagogical device in a much broader sense. This tension is located between a constant demand on professionalization and, within this specialization, the need to define what is educational, and to question what educational curatorship does differently to a more academic type of curating. At the time I didn't consider pursuing training in curatorial studies. I only learned about it when I started working in this museum. What took me to these experiences on a professional level was related with specific experiences brought about by my own context and environment.

I would like to ask you now about one of your latest and more personal projects, *Entre Utopía y Desencanto* [Between Utopia and Disenchantment]. How was it shaped and what kind of learning experiences did it bring you?

I started thinking about it when I was still a fellow at the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program in New York in 2010. Thanks to some workshops I did afterwards in ICI and other parallel experiences, I moved forward in this research and started shaping the type of methods I would use to develop the project in a collaborative way. I wanted to address this project not only from an affective, emotional perspective, but also from a historic perspective, as a way of learning through these experiences, and the implications of doing this as an artistic project. By the end of 2012 I had applied to every open

call I found online, and very fortunately received the necessary funding to actually be able to call other colleagues to work on it with me. So I came back to Mexico where I was immersed in this for two years, between Cuernavaca and D.F.

The project *Between Utopia and Disenchantment* consists of 2 parts. The first one was based on my own research about the community experience my parents underwent together with other families in Cuernavaca. My guiding question here was: how was this project conceived as ‘communitarian’ and what does this imply for them? My parents, influenced by Liberation Theory and a left wing religious group, began to be part of this project, along with other teenagers, from a very young age. They soon generated a platform of new methodologies to work in groups, which they successfully implemented in institutions, social development, rural education and occasionally business companies. That’s how they developed a shared economic structure, plus the fact that some of them began to form couples and had children. So it was a big group of people formed by families and friends, who shared common projects, their sources of income, the children’s education, and a place to reflect on their own and how they grew as a community. After some time, they discussed the possibility of sharing also the living spaces, moving outside of Mexico City, and moved to Cuernavaca which seemed a good alternative. Out of these 25 initial families only 3 of them went there, including my parents.

What are your memories from this early experience?

I remember we moved to a big house that was divided into 3 floors. Each family had their own space but we shared the kitchen, the living room and garden. All the parents soon split into roles and agreed that all decisions were to be taken by consensus, which implied a constant state of negotiation. This notion of extended family was also including our education, values, and the general economy of the house, as the incomes were all equally distributed and commonly owned.

When I came back to do this personal research I got in touch with members of these families with whom I lived until

I was 6 years old. We went back to the places where it started, although the house is no longer there; it was a very strong experience. I felt the need to ask them many questions, about how they got organized, about what decisions worked out or didn't, and about how they lived this experience on a personal level. The rupture of a communal project is always painful, there were people who never spoke to each other again. However, there is an underlying learning, a life experience which was brought by committing to a shared project. That's why the project is called *Entre Utopía y Desencanto* [Between Utopia and Disenchantment]. On one side, you have the risk of proposing and committing fully to an alternative way of life where elements like work, education, alimentation, power relations, and a shared economy were settled in a completely different way. On the other, I also wanted to investigate the difficulties that came up during this process. I was interested in an inter-generational perspective, a conversation that had not happened. To speak with people my age, who were my 'siblings' within the community, to see how differently they experienced this way of life among them and in relation to their parents. So my main goals were to speak and interview all these people. I wanted to try to bring together a series of fragmented personal narratives, a suspended collectivity. But also to recollect the library, an archive, in order to see what sources they were using to sustain their ideals and way of living.

How was the second stage of the project developed?

Well, as I was interviewing them, I got to know more about Cuernavaca's historical place, as a city where various alternative projects took place. I already knew this in a way but I never looked at it in detail. Cuernavaca is only one hour away from the capital city; it's called the city of the eternal spring, given the nice weather. It has been a place for social experimentation since pre-hispanic times. The Tlahuicas for example developed there a social organizational model that doesn't exist in any other pre-hispanic culture in Mexico. Hernán Cortés built his palace there, and later on the Habsburgs as well.

I was interested in focusing on 4 concrete characters and some experiences that took place between 1950 and 1983. My questions about these previous projects came after reflecting on my own family experience. But although this was my initial point of departure I didn't consider it the topic of the whole project. As I told you, on this second phase I wanted to focus on particular events and people who developed community based projects, some of which are still going today.

The first was around Iván Illich, he arrived to Cuernavaca in 1961 and founded the CIDOC (Centro Intercultural de Documentación) [Intercultural Centre of Documentation]. Before arriving he first spent some time in New York, where he had family. After learning Spanish he developed a strong relationship with the Puerto Rican community. Soon after he travelled to Puerto Rico as Vice Director of Universidad de Ponce, where he continued with his idea of developing critical research on intercultural processes, and analyzing the role of the Catholic Church as part of the colonization processes in Latin America. He was there for 5 years, and then he finally travelled to Mexico with economic support from New York to open this center that lasted until 1976.

He initiated this Center based on 2 premises. On the one side, in order to justify this financial funding, it should provide a 'cultural course' to North American and European missionaries that came to Latin America for them to have a better understanding of the context and language. Parallel to this, the Center had a critical project to question the modern institutions as anchored to the economic model based on a Western perspective. The first institution he criticized was the school. Back in Puerto Rico, he discussed with Everett Reimer the creation of an educational project for Puerto Rico's island. Among the discussions that came up, there was the question of whether to have schools or not, what's their purpose, what are the social roles they foster, and what power relations do they establish. That's why the first programs he organized in CIDOC were a series of seminars on alternative ways of education. These seminars were held in high regard amongst

international and local academics, theoreticians, educators and they soon became a reference. He was also in dialogue with Paulo Freire, and other educators and agents of the peasant movement in Brazil. In this way, CIDOC became a place where topics such as land's rights, indigenous movements and educational processes were discussed.

These seminars lasted for 7 years, and parallel to them Illich worked on his thesis, which later became *La sociedad descolarizada* (1971) [Deschooling Society]. In this book he develops a school phenomenology, describing to detail how it becomes a place of confinement where dynamics are imposed by an authority justified as a guide in a learning process. Where knowledge and the processes that lead to it are predefined and where a certification system measures understanding and validates qualifications and productivity. He speaks about this as the founding introjection of a cultural model of power relations that are basic for the economical model to survive. He also analyses other kinds of non-scholarly learning systems in a section called *Tramas del aprendizaje* [Learning Webs]. This center became a methodological reference for my own research, in trying to think about how to learn from these stories in Cuernavaca, implementing methods developed by Illich years before.

The proposal was to make this a collective endeavor, a shared learning interest to those who were personally, professionally or affectively drawn to these ideas and experiences.

What other cases did you research?

In the 1950s, a priest with a background on liturgical renovation opened a Benedictine Monastery in Cuernavaca. His goal was to reconfigure the communal experience and community practice within a Monastery. After a hallucinatory episode and conversations with colleagues, he decided to start a psychoanalytic work. After his personal experience with analysis, he gradually brought psychoanalysts to the Monastery, to develop group work with the people who lived there. These psychoanalysts were engaged in the emergence of group psychoanalysis,

which sought to transform individual analysis into a tool with a higher social reach through group work, which differed to classically paid-in individual consultations. After some time, press scandals and religious pressure to end ties to the Vatican, they founded the first psychoanalytic institute called Emaús. Parallel to this, as one of the monks was an architect, Fray Gabriel Chávez de la Mora, who made sure the monastery's spaces were built according to their new functions. New circular spaces were designed for meetings. There was a whole plastic, musical and visual expression that joined these moments of encounter.

The third case comes as a derivation of CIDOC's activities. Betsie Hollants, a Belgian journalist, was invited by Illich to be part of the discussions that were taking place there. She came with a special interest in the women's situation in Latin America, and after finding little resonance to this topic in CIDOC, she developed a parallel center in 1965 called Cidhal. This was one of the first feminist institutions in Latin America, and with time became a meeting center for women pedagogues and anthropologists, who participated in the formation of a documentation center. Cidhal was in dialogue with educators influenced by the theory of liberation and by Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and together they developed a series of popular educational programs for women, reflecting on educational proposals from a feminist perspective, among many other projects.

How about the last one?

In the 1950s, Sergio Méndez Arceo arrived to Cuernavaca as a Bishop. The State of Morelos has a pre-revolutionary history of worker and agrarian movements that are important in understanding the context to which he arrived. One of the things he did was to rebuild Cuernavaca's Cathedral by removing all the ornaments and golden pieces, and recovering the original architecture. He also invited other architects and artists, such as Mathias Goeritz and the Benedictine Fray Gabriel Chávez de la Mora, to re-think that space in aesthetic terms. There's an interesting crossover between a minimalistic, abstract

language and the will to emphasize this mystical encounter instead of the icons. The mass was said in Spanish and with the priest facing the people before the II Vatican Council [1962-1965] took place, instead of Gregorian chants they included Mariachis and some other affiliated churches incorporated pre-hispanic musical instruments as well.

The Cathedral soon became a meeting place closely related with worker's movements, which soon became a threat for conservative parties in Mexico. Méndez Arceo was friendly with Fidel Castro and he pronounced himself against repression, disappearances, and murder of the students mobilised in 1968 and further years. Later on, he showed support against the military coup in Chile. All of these gestures brought up tense polemics among Mexican politicians, conservative circles, and official media.

What would be the common anchoring point for these references in your project?

I was interested in learning about how these figures and historic moments formed actual movements, how they related to radical proposals articulated through education, community-based organizations and social movements. For me, the triggering point in this second stage of the project was to learn from what happened in our own context, to recover a lost memory partly erased given the threat it represented and also for the ruptures within the groups and later generations. They are not only stories, but a type of learning based on experiences that are seldom communicated or debated.

What type of activities did you develop together with the participants during the first year of the project?

For the first year, I proposed a small group to be a core nucleus, planning a series of encounters in Tapalehui to discuss if these previous experiences in Cuernavaca had influenced and shaped the context we from which we were working, and if so, in what way. Sol Henaro, Naomi Rincón Gallardo, Mauricio Marcin and Maru Calva, along with Marcela Flores and later

Finella Halligan, conformed the group. We worked intensively on this. We reconfigured the initial proposal I had outlined, and developed a secondary one together. For 1 year, in 2013, we approached a growing group of artists, educators, psychoanalysts and activists from different generations in order to explore how we could learn from these recent experiences in Mexico in a collective way. We built a documentation center with all the information we could gather, including videos, archive images, CIDOC's and Iván Illich's publications, along with bibliography and references on 4 main topics: Alternatives in Education, Community-based Movements, Community Health and Group Psychoanalysis, and Situated Feminism.

We contacted learning fellows, people for whom this information is relevant in relation to their own practices and also the ones who had actually taken part in these experiences.

I was mainly interested in having an intergenerational dialogue, collective memory exercises, and in trying to track these recent experiences from an affective genealogy. To see how these initiatives opened the breach to other explorations related with communitarian activities. I'm not a historian, so I was less interested in documenting a period of time, and more focused in the affective relations, the formative narratives, the lived experiences of those involved in the past initiatives, and the connections, responses and reactions to those who were reapproaching them from a younger perspective.

So you could say that in the end the project reflected a mixture of actual facts, personal and collective memories, life stories...

Yes, and in the process we were surprised to find relations among people that we never could have foreseen as being related. After the public part was over I could see that this experience generated subtle, but powerful and ongoing relations among the various participants of the project.

We developed a public program to address both certain specific dialogues with this collective memory, and other participatory dynamics which were created after our encounters and discussions. In April 2014, a 4-day public program

with workshops, panel discussions, weaving sessions and loud reading, staged performances, group therapy techniques and a dance floor, inaugurated a documentation center set up as a reading room in a specialized timeline with our research materials. This was open to the public at Jardín Borda in Cuernavaca, until the end of July 2014.

Collaborators included Eunice Adorno, Beta-Local/La Práctica (Puerto Rico), Maru Calva, Colectivo AM, Colectivo Marabunta, Cráter Invertido/Revista Cartucho, Alejandro Chao, Abraham Cruzvillegas, Jesús Cruzvillegas, Gustavo Esteva, EmergenciaMX, Ángeles Fuentes, Finella Halligan, Sol Henaro, Pablo Helguera, Tamara Ibarra, Magali Lara, Juan Alberto Litmanovich, Mauricio Marcin, Sylvia Marcos, Marcela Marcos, Jorge Margolis, Sarah Minter, Nuria Montiel, Taniel Morales, Roberto Ochoa, Sofía Olascoaga, Jean Robert, Ignacio Plá, Vicente Razo, Naomi Rincón-Gallardo, Javier Sicilia, Universidad de la Tierra Oaxaca.

Are you planning to show this archive in a different context or within art institutions?

I would like to make sure it is available for open access. I would be interested in making a copy of the archive so it could be active in other places, especially in Cuernavaca. We are also pending a digitalization process, which would make the material accessible online regardless of physical location. There's a project called *Aeromoto*, initiated recently by Mauricio Marcin and Maru Calva who were part of the initial nucleus group for this project. It resonates in many ways with the documentation center we made public in Cuernavaca as part of a public program in April 2014. *Aeromoto* works as a mixture of an independent space, a collective, and a public library, where they run different activities. Next week, part of our archive of *Between Utopia and Disenchantment* will be exhibited there and we would like to open reading sessions and debates taking this material as a point of departure.

Last question. You will be working in the curatorial team for the next São Paulo Biennial. How do you envision this challenge and what are your ideas regarding working with the local educational team?

The invitation to take part in this biennial came from Jochen Volz, Chief Curator, who I met during the very early process of exploring the possible shapes of *Between Utopia and Disenchantment*. I was invited to be one of 4 co-curators, without explicitly delimiting an educational role. After the second curatorial meeting we had in São Paulo last July, I had the opportunity to stay longer and to get to know the Biennial Fundacion team, and more specifically the educational projects, history and outreach. I am interested in working closely to everyone in the team, to learn from their experience, and to think of these as common resource platforms, and exchange tools while taking part in an ongoing intensive dialogue. I'm certainly interested in recovering past memories of educational projects but also of collaboration in other places of Latin America, and I think the biennial could be a good platform for this to happen. But at the same time, I'm aware that biennials build *the* structure for contradictions to take place; they are part of a globalized economic model, of a certain idea of what art is, a space where political and discursive tensions take place together with conflicts of interest. I am learning how to negotiate in this context and at the same time committing to explore the type of experiences that may create knowledge and a significant meaning for as many interlocutors as possible.

The one who walks beside

Erick Beltrán



1



2, 3



4

How to visualize something?

How do things appear to us?

How are we able to recognize an element and extract it from the background with just a glimpse?

These questions do not only refer to perception and physical interaction with the universe but to the construction of knowledge as well.

Libraries represent one of the visible faces of knowledge. This one in particular {*image 1*} gathers the first intifada Palestinian rebel communications and leaflets in Ramallah. Reading these would mean that immediately after either you would eat, burn or bury them since a 3 years prison sentence for their possession was issued by the Israeli army. This image introduces us the difference between seeing something and having the apparition of something.

These walls {*image 2*} constitute the dancing halls of one of the main Dabke companies in the West Bank. Dabke is a popular folk dance that became a symbol of resistance to occupation. Dabke steps and gestures mimic those of harvesting and ploughing soil.

These bricks {*image 3*} hold as well another archive of intifada secret bulletins. In between group rehearsals these pamphlets were changing hands, read and hidden in the cracks, inadvertently creating an archive of strategies, plans and methods that embrace the whole community.

Two things are working in these images: on one side the visibility of a seemingly natural garden or the symbolic and graphic gestures of the Dabke, and on the other, the invisible telluric forces that support the psyche of an entire national cultural identity. Only through the knowledge of what is not presented do the images achieve their full strength.

This {*image 4*} is the Wanda Svevo archive at São Paulo Bienial Foundation. For the last biennial I was invited to work with it, in collaboration with Ana Luiza Mattos (coordinator) who

originally proposed to open the shelves to the general public during the exhibition. But this was a complicated task indeed, dealing with conservation issues when receiving 150.000 visitors. The archive receives donations from pairs all over the world and usually in 2 or 3 copies, so she wondered how to use these doubles. Do we need to build a new library for them?

What to do when the space reserved for something is occupied? How are things classified in a society?

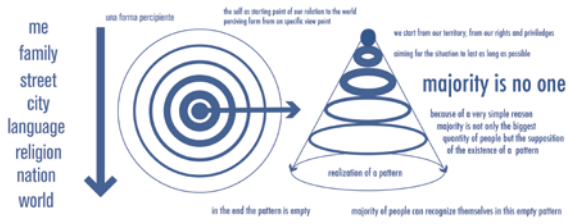
One of the key elements of contemporary society is the creation of a pattern unit. It can be defined as the reference (or strategy) to divide and classify (cut through) an entity. It is the standardized method to organize things in the collective. In Western ideology, this unit is defined as a white man between 40 and 50 years old, rich, with a family and a heritage. This man incarnates the reference unit on the scale equivalent to what we consider the space of the individual. Having fewer attributes than this subject will decrease the space, while the opposite will expand it.

There is an interesting trick around this prototype; the public contemporary narrative is founded on the notion that everybody is equal in a society, but in fact, democracy is not to fulfill a need or desire of the majority, but to meet the requirements of the pattern unit.

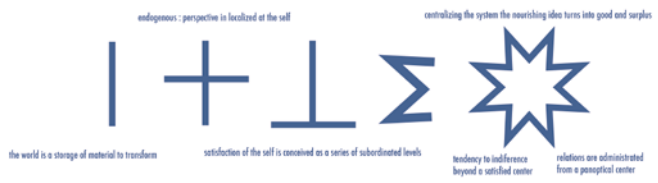
This unit is a void by definition; nobody can incarnate it completely. And since it is empty, there is always the attraction to take its space. It turns itself into a center sucking everything but at the same time repelling everyone in defense of its territory.

In fact, this unit is a reaction to the problem of how to approach reality and how things appear in the universe. Ultimately there are 2 options to visualize the real:

- a) As I open my eyes there is a difference between me and the rest, so I will use my point of view as reference, as a starting point. I will use my eyes to reach as far as I can, from this center down to the limits.



5



6



7



b) Y... ers

and in order to place myself I need to relate to other things. There is no difference between me and others.

The creation of the horizon is a matter of perspective, site and panoramic view. In order to make things appear, this letter, this word, this page, this book, you need to take a position: things are coming to me or I have to understand relations among things.

The pattern unit demands that everything starts from a center (the self). This center is a trick, since its space/territory overlaps to the one of the self. A point of view can't see itself interacting with the universe so automatically it is alienated. And worse, it is self-affirmative since every time a gesture is made it can be seen as a confirmation of consistency. A point of view {*image 5*} always incarnates 'THE' point of view, since it's pure concentration.

If you are coming from the periphery or outskirts of a city you have to fuse with things in order to be part of a movement. You need to have an approval not from an inner voice but from the other. Everything seems connected to each other and you don't know how your position will change the general composition.

*União Popular de Mulheres de Campo Limpo* [Popular Union of Women of Campo Limpo] was invited to 31th São Paulo Bien-nial as a connection between the city and its periphery.

Campo Limpo {*images 6, 7*} is on the limits of this city (2 hours from downtown by public transport) and at the end of the 70s it used to be a popular destination for massive immigration from small towns and inner cities since lodging was cheap and it was close enough that the father could go work to the city and return on weekends. Consequently, Campo Limpo turned into a town governed by women. Public programs never reached these families since it was not considered a real city until recently. There was no light, water nor transport. These women started schools for children or places for the elderly in their own houses and with time it got so organized and developed, with 300 families, that a bank was created with its own currency: the *Sampaivos*. This self-organized cultural agency

has immigrant black origins and represents a criticism to the pattern unit.

Part of their activities as a social organization is to plan the *saraos*, which are half parties, half concerts, taking place at private houses since theaters and concert halls are almost non-existent in the periphery. These events involve hip-hop, samba and poetry duels where everybody gets involved not only as spectator. It is a social model that should be exported everywhere.

Community money {*images 8, 9*} was introduced in Brazil, Fortaleza, around 1998. This model consists of creating a unit that represents a certain effort that can be exchanged with another person in the community for something else. You can be paid for physical work in Sampaio to buy shoes in your neighborhood instead of going downtown to get the same shoes. In order to make this coin work, the whole community had to agree in its use. There are many social coins in the world: Colombia, Cuba, Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, with beautiful names: one *future*, one *martian*, one *patativa*, one *cube*. As opposed to standard currencies, Sampaio (and most community currencies) do not speculate with capital. They allow low fix rate interest in credit for concerts, publications, instruments and cultural affairs.

Buildings and their electrified fences, cars and parking lots {*image 10*} are natural enemies of these popular communities since they represent the arrival of middle class with no social attachment to the neighborhood, since all their affairs are done in downtown São Paulo. Families that would prefer a supermarket to a street market, or people that just go to sleep there. The government prefers profitable land speculation and massive skyscrapers rather than self-organized strategies.

Invited to work with the community of Campo Limpo and to understand this optional unit in construction, *cultura da periferia*, I proposed a drawing workshop to gather images that could describe in an encyclopedic way Campo Limpo. What would the group select as a model for their drawings?



11-13}. Their main connection with the city was the very thing institutions present as a metaphor of degradation. Buildings, advertisements, friends, family, police, cars and cartoons slowly started appearing in our catalogue. At that moment it was not difficult to realize the 2 ingredients with which to work: these drawn testimonies and the biennial's doubled books. It was decided that these duplications would be donated after the exhibition to the community and that the drawings were going to be placed inside the pages of the books. The result: an archive inside the books of a library.

This diagram {*image 14*} describes how the individual is a mirage, or a way of seeing a bigger body (the collective) under certain force. The subject is the action of focusing on certain coordinates and it can be explained with the metaphor of folding paper. The social is like a huge sheet of paper. If we want to point out a certain element (subject) we have to create an anomaly in the material: something that could step out of the flat generic surface. An efficient way to do it is by applying force to this horizontal platform in order to bend it and create a corner. The unique elevation and protuberance created by folding is the individual. The original paper has not suffered any transformation since a folded paper is just another way of seeing a paper. The force applied to the social is called 'narrative'.

Ideology creates archetypes to mark unavoidable 'folds' in the surface of society. If we gather these prototypes and myths, a scale and a pattern can be perceived.

These mythological characters (doubles) represent attempts to define the singularity of the individual. The double is the critic of the unreachable unit.

The reading of the real has to start somewhere, so we create an imaginary place that is the self. This 'me' is just a methodological tool.

If you go into this 'me', who claims himself as unique, he breaks apart in an infinite series of selves.

Who is the one who moves my body when I bump my knee? Who is the one who beats my heart? Who is the one controlling



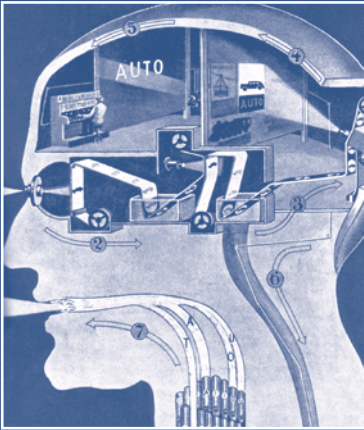
15



16



17



19



18



while dreaming? Who is the one who speaks in altered states?

Who creates my subconscious? There is a multitude inside me, controlling me. The self can't stand on its own. The self is never alone.

There is a little door {images 15-16} in the old synagogue of Prague for the Golem to go in. The Golem is a mythical entity representing the entire society, a figure created by a magician to fight against dangers. With time, however, it became so powerful and uncontrollable that it went against the ones he was supposed to defend. This door in Prague is waiting for his return, and that little door is also the one we have inside ourselves.

In medieval times the homunculus was thought to be the philosopher's stone, an entity that could be created from an alchemical process {image 19} at will. Later on, when Christiaan Huygens saw for the first time a little man inside the sperm with his microscope, he draw the conclusion that mankind already had a multitude of future men.

Ryle's regression {images 17, 18} is a logical paradox claiming that for the apparition of a man, another man is needed with the evident impossibility of an original one. Is there no start for men? In modern times, mental processes are represented as a person inside a control cabin. A machine controlled by an individual using buttons. Who is the one really controlling, if this man can have another man controlling, and this one another, and like this to the infinite?

These examples {images 20, 21} show the crucial space the double takes. The *doppelgänger* is a German myth, which claims that when someone is about to die, this person will be able to see himself outside his own body, like seeing someone else. This image recalls the one of Ouroboros, where the snake eats its tail inferring that the only way to reach closure is to reach oneself. *Doppelgänger* can then be translated as the one who walks beside.

# THE DOUBLE

When the self dies  
the body remains until decay.

Why can't the self control the body in its entirety?

Who controls body reflexes and involuntary  
movements?

Who is the one speaking in altered states?

Who is creating dreams?

*Is there an original division of pneuma and the body?*

Is there a subconscious?

The self can not ignore the  
**OTHER** within itself.

## Doppelgänger :

the figure of the self outside its limits, perceived  
as another entity, could only mean death is  
imminent.

The self seeing itself closes the circle of its own beginning.

The horizon has been reached.

The self can't get rid of the doubt of its false unicity.

*The self considers itself a singularity but at the same time perceives a nested singularity which can not be controlled.*

The double is described as the monster, as a nightmare that should be forgotten.

The unique can not get rid of the competition of the

**SHADOW.**

SINGULARITY CAN NOT IGNORE THE SPLIT IN ITS OWN DEFINITION. ON THE OTHER HAND, MULTIPLICITY (THE UNIVERSE) DOES NOT NEED OR DEFIED BY THE SINGULAR.

defined parallel situations or cases:

- 1) The conscious and the unconscious: self-confirmation control mental state and abstract uncontrollable mental drive.
- 2) Cogito versus *res extensa*: knowledge versus the rest. *Res extensa* literally means everything that is not classified.
- 3) Pattern unit versus multitude: one mold versus an infinite possibility of forms.
- 4) Pneuma (soul) versus body: moving energy versus matter.
- 5) Self versus collective: concentration versus redistribution. Liberalism/capitalism versus self organized community.
- 6) The center versus the periphery: maps versus spheres.

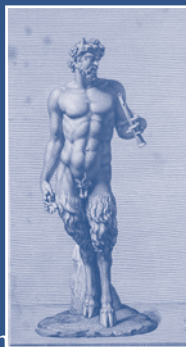
If you start describing each line in detail, myths and icons start to arise. Myths work as marks on unavoidable shadows:

The figure of the hero is the apparition of the pattern unit in social psyche. The hero is a strategy to tell the stories of a whole culture (multiple men) as a coherent single narrative. Heracles {*image 22*} embodies the stories of the conquest of the ancient world by Greece and the expansion of frontiers pictured as fights against monsters of dreams.

The mother of Heracles was fooled and seduced by Zeus as Amphytrion double. Mercury took the identity of Sosias, Amphytrion's servant.

Heracles was in consequence a twin. His twin brother Iphicles, with a human father, was the lame version of the hero: weak, a traitor and a politician.

Heracles had an encounter with a magician who turns him into a woman (Homphales).





identities entered within the classification of the monster since the concept of simultaneity (in the line of tension between psyche and body) is filled with half-men-half-horses (centaurs), half-women- half-fish (sirens) and of course half-men-half-women (hermaphrodites). In ideological terms, non-canonic identities are treated as hybrid monsters {images 23-30} with terrible social historical consequences.

This {images 31} is the *Doppelgänger* library; in each book we can find either drawings of Campo Limpo workshops or one of the 2000 images gathered during the doubles investigation.

The library has a double classification: the regular alphabetical way of ordering the books and the images living in between its pages according to the *doppelgänger* classification system.

When a book is opened, images from these different and multiple sources collide, adding layers of meaning through conceptual or formal relations and often creating a third narrative between these 2 orders. This third order is our own unconscious (our double) taking the role of the active reader, pushing for a narrative or sense, in a certain way, making himself appear.

All the books and drawings are now kept in *O Goma*, the most recent cultural space opened by Agência Solano Trindade and part of the *União Popular de Mulheres* of Campo Limpo.

the self has  
**COLONIZED**

the idea of the unit.  
*The Only Unit We Are Able To See  
Is The Self.*

reproduced endlessly on all screens, in all media and mirrors.

Political Status

individual  
power

SUBJECT  
SUBJECT

MATTER substance  
MATTER object

Physical Status

**SUBJECT**

mobile

**MASS**

static

Reading is a choice, what will appear depends

**MASS**

mobile

**SUBJECT**

static

Surplus

object  
value

MATTER  
SUBJECT

SUBJECT  
MATTER

consumer  
individual

The Masses

time accordingly. The trick the self play on itself is that the chosen unit



to have just one reference point with no distance, no horizon and that

*Scale is also a possibility of comparing other units,  
so to inhabit one into other.*

# The self is a methodological trick to read the real.

TRUTH AS DEFINITIVE DATA VS  
TRUTH AS AN APPROXIMATIVE METAPHOR.

Let's suppose for a minute that...

**THE SELF DOES NOT EXIST.**

How could a MULTIPLE or COLLECTIVE  
consciousness be visualized?

How would it diverge from the current image  
of the universe?

The problem of singularity and multiplicity  
resides on the different scales between elements  
while reading something.

**Reading is a choice, depending on what we read, what will appear**

It should not be forgotten that to visualize is a process.  
Apparition of everything is transformation.

The bigger the distance, the larger the multiplicity.

## The result wasn't important. An interview with Masha Ru

Katia Krupennikova

\*

As part of the symposium *Surrounding Education*, TAAK organized a special lunch. This event was a part of a bigger initiative titled *Grondstof*, which included an artistic contribution to the program of De Boe School in the neighborhood. Visual artists Ruchama Noorda, Richtje Reinsma and Masha Ru conducted workshops for the educational curriculum of De Boe. *Grondstof* was devoted to spiritual, scientific, historic, subjective or intuitive forms of knowledge about food and hygiene. It was also about relating to the unknown and invisible nature in, on and around the body; and human connections to the earth and bacteria in particular.

The lunch event for the conference was organized by Masha Ru, an artist and scientist based in Amsterdam, who researches the phenomenon of eating earth-based substances. Masha has introduced the schoolchildren to the fundamentals of her artistic research along with the concept of Geophagy and its contradictions. Geophagy is the practice of eating earth or soil-like substrates. In a number of countries all over the world eating soil is a common cultural, spiritual or healing practice. At the same time, in Europe and the USA eating earth-based substances is officially regarded as a psychological disorder, known as "Pica".

Developed in close collaboration with artist and cook Dina Roussou and the pupils, the lunch allowed the participants of the symposium to taste the qualities of and the differences between 'conventional' food and food with a little bit of clay.

In this interview Masha Ru elaborates on the starting points and objectives of her research.

*Katia Krupennikova* : When and why did you start to work with the soil?

*Masha Ru* : This project is a realization of my personal desires. Since childhood I wanted to eat soil, clay and even ceramics. Specifically I was attracted to bricks made of red clay. As an artist I started to work with the eatability of clay in 2011.

Why do you think this research is pertinent?

There are a lot of aspects in this research. One of them is cultural. In a number of countries in Africa and Latin America consuming soil-based substances is a well-known traditional and spiritual practice. At the same time in Europe and USA, geophagy is officially regarded as a psychological disorder. This is fascinating because this dual perception serves a good example of diversity in ways of existing: something that is normal for one culture may be a taboo in another culture.

Do you think that everything that challenges Western culture is seen as marginal?

Geophagy is widely scientifically researched. Western scientists specifically go to Latin America or Africa to prove how unhealthy it is. What they do is analyze the samples and compare it to US or EU standards. On the other hand, for the same Western standards Coca-Cola is an acceptable product for health, and is widely sold. I believe that in comparison to soil, Coca-Cola and many other artificial or genetically modified products are doubtfully healthier. In fact this comparison and adjusting to 'western standards' seems to me a colonization process still in progress.

Could you please tell me more about this research and its aspects?

First I had an idea to make eatable ceramic cups to symbolize a crossover between natural instincts and social norms. It's possible that we have the same instinct to eat soil as many animals do. First of all clay acts as a detoxicant. Secondly, it contains a lot of minerals and elements that live organisms need for functioning. On the other hand, society claims it is forbidden. It's fascinating to research this intersection. On this borderline

there appear such phenomena as for instance, fetish. It means that when you break through the dogma, your natural desire transforms into more than just an instinct, but further it brings satisfaction from doing a forbidden thing. Double pleasure.

How did it happen that this project became educational?

Initially this project originates from a participatory idea. It is a space for a group experience. When I've made my first try out in the form of clay cups, I aimed to share the eating experience with the audience.

In working on this project, what have you found differs from working with adults to working with kids?

I think that children still don't have a predetermined mindset regarding social behavior. Adults need guidance; they are careful and cautious. And children immediately start finding a diverse usage to it. You tell them that it is possible to eat it, or do whatever with it, and there follows an open result - they immediately try it out. Clay is often used in spiritual rituals, during which it is placed on the face and other parts of the body. I think children feel it intuitively.

What kind of feedback do you get?

In educational practices most of the time the result plays a crucial role. In this case, for me the most important thing is the process. Both working with children and adults, it's more about the group experience and having contact with the material. For instance, in schools the teacher usually gives the kids a specific task: 'make a cup'. I didn't have a task for them, the actual result wasn't important. And the teachers were surprised in the beginning, they didn't know how to arrive to a result without a given final destination. But it's not about the destination, it's about an experiment, and the result here is just an excuse to initiate the process.



*Lunch event for Surrounding education,  
Masha Ru in collaboration with cook Dina Roussou  
and children from De Boe school, in the frame  
of Grondstof project. Photo by Victoria Ushkanova.*

# The Book of Aesthetic Education of the Modern School

Priscila Fernandes



Some of the books published by *La Escuela Moderna*.  
Image courtesy of the artist.

\*

The following text is a revised transcription from Priscila Fernandes out of her presentation at *Surrounding Education. Towards new integrations with the Curatorial and Artistic fields*, 6-7 June 2015, TAAK, Amsterdam.

*I walk quickly through a labyrinth of cobbled streets before a vista opens in front of me in rectilinear precision. I'm at the Eixample, a district surrounding the medieval city of Barcelona that started to develop in the nineteenth century. With houses designed by Modernista architects, like Gaudi, this is the heart of Spanish modernism, and a small sample of the technical, innovative and scientific progress growing in the city. In the distance smoke bellows from the chimneys of textile factories, drawing a line that extends along the railway to the rocky seaside.*

*At El Quatre Gats I order a long drink and look at the drawings of a young artist: Pablo Picasso. In the café I soon recognize that the crowd is mainly made up of artists, I can hear them talking heatedly and words jump from mouth to mouth:*

**INNOVATION! MODERNITY!**

**AWAY WITH CONSERVATISM! STOP LOOKING AT THE PAST!**

*Paranoid as I am, I can see their eyes observing me. I'm 114 years away from home. Suddenly, outside, a startling sound interrupts the gaze. Groups of workers run through the streets, riots, protests, barricades, in the distance churches are burning. I find refuge at the library of The Modern School. I read the titles of the school's modest red teaching manuals: science, history, literature. I try looking for a book about art, but it's nowhere to be found.*

[ Extract from: Priscila Fernandes, *The Book of Aesthetic Education of the Modern School*, 2014 ]

\*

In 1901 Catalan pedagogue Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia founded *La Escuela Moderna* (*The Modern School*), a primary school for children based on freethinking, rational, secular, universal and egalitarian education. At a time in which education was under the auspices of the Catholic Church and focused on capitalist, imperialist and nationalist values, Ferrer i Guàrdia was influ-

enced by the oppositional revolutionary message that anarchists and freethinkers were spreading among the new social groups that were created in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. In a milieu of great technical progress, with an expanding industrial working force lacking organization, the school that Ferrer implemented was intended to create the foundations of a strong combative labour movement, as well as to implement a radical educational change where the goal was to prepare the students to not be subjected to the totalitarian powers, and to teach them egalitarian values.

For Ferrer promoting free thought, not offering rewards or punishments, no exams or competition, was key for a fairer society. He invested in a co-education of social classes and genders and aimed at dissolving the intellectual and emotional prejudices that separated these groups. He qualified his educational program as rational and scientific, in which the study of sciences was considered key for an emancipatory education, fighting the power of the state and religious dogmas through a form of pedagogical revolution. Not surprising then that Ferrer's project is at times called a nursery of rebellious citizens of Barcelona. Indeed, one could say that some of the teachers had sympathies from the ideologies spreading through the libertarian and anarcho-comunist groups of the time. With the *Semana Trágica* [Tragic Week, July 1909], a series of bloody confrontations between the Spanish army and the working class, Ferrer is accused of being the instigator of the antimilitarist, anticolonial and anticlerical riots. Ferrer was executed by firing squad in October 1909, after a trial conducted without any proof against him, and *The Modern School* closes its doors. His execution brought a wave of protests around Europe and America, in Spain the protests eventually result on the downfall of the government.

Despite its short existence, *The Modern School* published more than 40 books and school manuals, in an attempt to break away from other school programs considered by them as incoherent: "a mixture of science and faith, reason and unreason, good and evil, human experience and revelation, truth

and errors in a word, totally unsuited to meet the new needs that arose with the formation of a new school.”<sup>1</sup>

In this collection of red pocket books we find titles focused on the natural and social sciences, such as *Nociones De Geografía Física* [Notions of Physical Geography], *Evolución de los Mundos* [Evolution of the Worlds], *Creación y Evolución* [Creation and Evolution], plus books focused on Arithmetic, Universal History and Psychology. Other books were more ideologically charged, offering a critical standpoint on patriotism and colonialism, the “horrors of war, and the iniquity of conquest or literary pieces that depict ‘social evils’”<sup>2</sup>, such as *Las Aventuras de Nono* [The Adventures of Nono] by Jean Grave, a story book about a little boy called Nono that is travelling through the country of Autonomy, a utopian place where boys and girls are equal, where there is no ill treatment or punishment and where one can enjoy freedom. The names of the characters give us an insight into the ideological charge: in the country of Autonomy, the story characters have names such as *Solidarity*, *Sincerity*, *Freedom* and *Labour*.

Looking through the material of *The Modern School* in Barcelona, and from the perspective of an artist, I was surprised not to have found a book about Aesthetic Education. Since the development of the School was stalled so abruptly in 1909, we can only wonder why art was not implemented, or what approach to art would have been like: Which artists would have been studied? What texts would have been used? What position would *The Modern School* have taken in relation to the diversity of artistic and discursive practices of the time?

More than cultivating an appreciation for Art, schools of this period were preoccupied in developing working habits, a sense of effort, patience and perseverance in the students: abilities needed to generate efficient industrial labour, but also a sense of rectitude. Art education was instrumentalized for that effect. Art exercises were not only based on repetition, but

1. Ferrer i Guàrdia, Francesc, *La Escuela Moderna*, p.41.

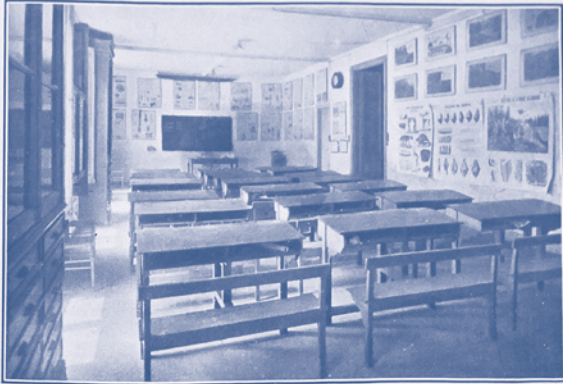
2. idem.

also focused on the discipline of technique, with the line being key. This appears to be a moral, as well as aesthetic issue: the discipline of the hand that draws is connected to the discipline of the body and moral conduct in general.

In the *Boletín de la Escuela Moderna* [Modern School Bulletin], a monthly newsletter published by *The Modern School*, we soon realize that this approach would not be promoted by the school. In the last newsletter, published just before the execution of Ferrer, we find an article entitled *¿Y el Arte?* [What about Art?], a question that resonated with my own interrogation at the start of my research. It consists of an excerpt of Peter Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread – The Need of Luxury* (1892), asserting that literature, science, and art must be cultivated by free man, in order to emancipate from the repression of state and capital.

These are ideas shared also by the Spanish libertarians, seeking to destroy the status of the work of art as the exclusive enjoyment of the wealthy classes and as an exclusive product, giving it the right to be enjoyed and created by every individual. Had the school not been closed so abruptly, this last article could lead us to think that the emphasis of *The Modern School* would be to follow an artistic praxis of a social and political art, giving art the mission of cultivating morals and constructing a fair society, revealing the ills of capitalism while still give an optimistic glimpse of the great human future.

## LA ESCUELA MODERNA DE BARCELONA



Casa superior de la Escuela Moderna

Como nota de actualidad publicamos varias vistas de la Escuela Moderna, de Barcelona, de la cual se ha hablado tanto en el proceso por el atentado contra los Reyes, y que después de este suceso fue cerrada por orden gubernativa.

Esta escuela fué fundada por Ferrer, que la organizó y dirigió de acuerdo con las ideas revolucionarias que profesa,

y en ella fué profesora Soledad Vilafranca, de cuyas relaciones íntimas con Ferrer se ha hablado en la vista de la casa, y estuvo empleado como bibliotecario el anarquista Morral. En el piso tercero de la casa ocupada por la Escuela Moderna es donde la policía encontró el equipaje de Morral, que éste había sacado de su antiguo domicilio al venir á Madrid.



Clase de Historia Natural



Clase de párvulos

The classrooms at *La Escuela Moderna*, date unknown.  
Image courtesy of Fundació Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia.

## Time Passes

Ane Hjort Guttu



*Time passes*, 2015. Video still.  
Image courtesy of the artist.

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The following text was presented at the *Surrounding Education. Towards new integrations with the Curatorial and Artistic fields*, 6-7 June 2015, TAAK, Amsterdam.

The film I will show here is called *Time Passes*, and it was produced last year in Bergen, Norway, for my solo show *eating or opening a window or just walking dully along* at the Bergen Kunsthalle. The initial idea for the film came from my own feeling when walking past beggars in my hometown of Oslo. I usually get caught up in the unsatisfying choice between 2 evils: to give and not to give feels equally condescending. I thought about what else I might possibly do, and got the idea that I could sit down beside one and stay there, to stage a literal, almost banal, image of equality. The idea led me to question what kind of person could possibly do such a thing: it would have to be an art student.

*Time Passes* stages precisely this project, carried out by 23-year-old Damla. She starts with an optimistic tone, soon developing a close relationship to her fellow beggar, Bianca. However, as time passes, and the discrepancy between life on the streets and life in the privileged surroundings of the art school grows, she becomes ever more tired and doubtful: both of the project's validity as an art project, and of her own motives for doing it.

The film is a fiction, but shot in a documentary style, with a small crew and a great degree of realism. The characters are played out by amateur actors with knowledge of their particular roles, in the sense that they 'play themselves'. Much of the script is written on the basis of interviews and dialogues with them.

Bergen, where the film is shot, is a midsize Scandinavian city with a history of commerce. It usually has a conservative city council and a weird mix of a very neat facade and a lot of social problems underneath. Making a major solo show commissioned by the Kunsthalle in this city, it was important to address some site-specific problems. The Norwegian government has recently instigated a huge debate following its proposal to ban street begging. However, the main purpose is not to portray this particular place, but rather to elaborate on some questions that have concerned me for a long time. The central problem can be summed up as follows:

A fictive, or real, but anonymous artist, feels that the art community, or the art scene, so to speak, cannot accommodate her work. The art context actually damages the work of art. For example, the display of the work makes it look like a selfish, self-centered project instead of a project about and for equality.

The artist therefore decides that she wants to move the project from ‘art’ into ‘life’. This demands that she doesn’t display the work. But how will the work then be known to anyone? It will be known ‘by itself’ – i.e. not known as an art work, but as something else, for example, begging. Since this implies that no one will know the symbolic quality of the work, I step in as the mediator, the person who can tell the audience what the artist herself will not tell. Thereby, I become a kind of traitor, but at least the artist in question does not have to compromise or betray her own conviction.

This is a situation that I have addressed in a number of works; for instance *Untitled (The City at Night)* (2013) and *JASON* (2015). I also had other motives for making the film. It annoys me that artists and art works are never portrayed or discussed in a serious way in film works of fiction. I have yet to see one film, (with the exception of biographical films), where art is treated and presented as if it was actually expressing something. Usually, the protagonist walks in and out of an art gallery, and the objects on the wall or the sculptures seem weird, not there to be understood, and completely taken out of any context. Alternatively, the protagonist meets an artist, and the artist is a personified cliché whose works are inaccessible. So I wanted to be completely pedagogical and actually show, through this film, that art has a meaning. I also wanted to show the beauty and the limitations of the art school. I have worked a lot as an art teacher, and to me the best situations of the art school, like the 1:1 tutorials or the group discussions, are non-instrumental and therefore filled with great potential and sincerity. I don’t know how the situation is in the Netherlands – if the open-minded, open-ended qualities of the art school are gone and replaced with neo-liberalist focus on results – but in Scandinavia, it is still possible to, for instance, be in a state of

crisis in the art school, as if crisis is a necessary and interesting thing. At its best, the art school conversations are an ideal dialogue, and the artistic practice in the art school is a model for how to deal with things, or as Damla puts it in the film: a place where you can change on the small scale what you actually want to change on the large scale.

At the same time, this freedom requires boundaries elsewhere. The Spanish writer Pablo Lafuente writes about *Time Passes*:

*At the art school, a dialogue is promoted by the dominant ideology, a dialogue that says that discourse is fundamental to a shared learning experience. To make art, this dynamic assumes, you have to be able and willing to talk about it. Here the discourse is apparently unmediated in its openness, but is in fact mediated by an entitlement, a confidence, a set of guarantees. It is possible, in this context, to call artistic work ('yours and the others') into question – no holds barred, no stone unturned, with no concern for emotional or existential positions, no fear of causing embarrassment or even pain. But this 'absolute questioning' is only possible because much is not questioned: the state apparatuses from and through which this discussion takes place remain in place, functioning throughout, and will likely remain untouched when the dialogue finishes, when this group of students moves on and makes room for another.<sup>1</sup>*

So we may assume that the freedom of the art school requires separation or seclusion, just like the freedom of art requires that it is enclosed in the concepts of the art world, the art institution, etc. This conflict adds some cruelty to the micro-utopia of the art school. As Russian writer and curator Ekaterina Degot writes:

<sup>1</sup> Lafuente, Pablo, *Art, Education and Critical Pedagogy. eating or opening a window or just walking dully along*, Sternberg Press, 2015.

*With so many small injustices, it is interesting to see a surreal discrepancy between how contemporary art sees and presents itself (as the critical zone in the cultural and political field, the zone of liberty, of free choice and free progressive reflection), and how it appears to the non-initiated (as an extremely undemocratic, opaque system of mutual backscratching).<sup>2</sup>*

The last aspect of the film that I would like to mention is its pedagogical style. It is a project where I have actually tried to introduce normal outsiders of art in addition to the discussions of the art school. While scripting it, I thought about how someone who has never been to art school could be able to understand the discussions and dilemmas of the protagonist. The purpose of this pedagogy might be to overcome some of the inaccessibility that Ekaterina Degot talks about above, by adapting to a more cinematic and narrative style, a greater degree of realism.

<sup>2</sup>. Degot, Ekaterina, "Art, its Before and its After" in *eating or opening a window or just walking dully along*, Sternberg Press, 2015.



## A picnic in a grove

Renata Cervetto

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In September 2013, *The School of Missing Studies* – an ongoing project of Bik van der Pol (Liesbeth Bik and Jos van der Pol) – took a new path. Invited by the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam, they adapted this moving, nomadic project, into an MFA program to be developed only once. For the past two years, thirteen international students with different backgrounds gathered in this special program and shared multiple discussions, classes, trips and meals. Most of them undertook a two-month trip to São Paulo for the 31st Biennial, where Bik van der Pol presented the project *Turning a Blind Eye* in collaboration with the group. Focused on a self-taught kind of learning, this temporary program fostered different types of group dynamics and collaborations. As a moving platform, it provided the opportunity to explore what it means to work and think in the artistic realm and position your own project in dialogue with other fields of knowledge. In the following interview, Eloise Sweetman (Australia), Mariana Lanari (Brazil), and Luisa Ungar (Colombia) will narrate their experiences and approaches towards this program, considering as well the challenges it implied for their own practice and their ideas regarding what a Master in Fine Arts should provide.

*Renata Cervetto* : What did this Master program imply for you, why have you chosen it specifically? What were your expectations, knowing that it wouldn't follow a regular Fine Arts program or structure?

*Eloise Sweetman* : I have a background in Arts Management, which is a Master I did in Utrecht and the reason why I'm in the Netherlands. The reason I moved here is because I was trying to figure out what Arts Management meant in a more in-depth way rather than running an art organization, to have a grasp of what this entails from a philosophical perspective. That Master didn't really give me what I wanted, it was more geared towards the application of artistic and design skills to business, which is not what I was looking for. But during that period I conducted research on audience development, investigating how an organization learns from the audience. When I came across the *School of Missing Studies* (SMS), there was something in the call about transgressing the borders of education and artistic practice, and although this isn't very clear, I felt it spoke to what I was looking at in terms of arts management and audience development. I feel very uncomfortable with labeling myself anything, so 'art worker' would be the most comfortable, as I've been doing this since I was 18, and have grown into it.

When I had the interview, I had the feeling they really understood what I was trying to say, what my concerns towards my position in art were, trying to move into an artistic practice. I think that is where all of us were, which I guess is not unusual for someone who wants to do a Master program. We all were in a situation where we have this background and wanted to move into something else, like a transitioning phase. In a way, the SMS provided place to deal with all this uncertainty.

During the interview, one of the tutors made an insightful remark when she asked me how could I, used to creating structures for other people to work within, create my own structures. I never thought about it from that perspective, and that idea stuck in my mind. It was not until 4 months ago that I felt I was actually doing that, creating structures for myself. At the beginning I didn't understand what I was doing in this Master,

I'm not very good at talking in groups, and in the SMS that is what we do. We sit around a table and we talk. For me it was terrifying, I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to contribute with anything. But as I said, 4 months ago I had this moment when I realized that first of all, I'm able to talk in a group and articulate my own ideas. It was interesting during the graduation show, I did a one on one performance tour through the building, and it was the first time that I didn't have a curator or someone like me, like an art worker, creating the structures. Then I realized the structures are important and to be able to create your own, that was a breakthrough for me.

Another aspect that attracted me to SMS was that our participation was supposed to be for 15 days a month, and then you would be able to do other things. But in the end this really didn't happen, we were there almost all the time. That really challenged my management and organizational skills, and as I was working I felt I was almost half there. There's an expectation of what a Master program is and we were all given that expectation, but when it's actually put into practice, it doesn't quite work as you have imagined it would. So in the end I would say the SMS became quite traditional because people demanded structure.

Bearing in mind how this Master was articulated, how do you think this 'transgressing the borders of education' took place?

*ES:* To be honest, I don't know if this really happened. Theoretically, I think the program is constantly in flux, moving, with people of different backgrounds, which is quite unique I would say. But I think it's interesting if you put all the islands next to each other and say what were they about, at the end they were all the same. I guess each tutor had similar methods, each had a list of readings and then we would talk about them.

I think that is a bit of a shame, it's not really transgressing anything if we are always sitting in a room, reading and talking to each other. That's my own problem, because I felt shy talking, but I don't know if that's necessarily different to any other Master program.

I'm also wondering how did you get along with a Master in Fine Arts that didn't necessarily make any particular emphasis on developing certain skills, in the sense of actually doing something. You constantly had a strong theoretical input, so how did you relate this to your own practice?

*ES:* Now that you mention it, I think all this theory did have an impact. The first year we were required to do something we wanted to share with the group, leading the group on a given day. Liesbeth and Jos called it a 'classroom', where each student would become a teacher. I also started writing a lot more, I was always interested in doing this but I was not confident to write fiction or poetry. In this sense, the writing tutor was very supportive in just giving me the space to try, and it turns out I'm not so bad at it. I think it had really infiltrated my practice, but I wouldn't say that the SMS gave me training, technical training. My thesis is divided into 3 parts, there's an interview, a fictional piece and an essay. If you read this as a writer, technically this is wrong, the structure is strange. We all were expected to develop a particular project, but it wasn't until the thesis that my project was put into play. From the second year we had personal tutors and also for writing, but I think we were also expected to collaborate. The SMS, I think since its beginnings in 2003, is about people with different backgrounds collaborating on projects, so I think this was part of how we would also work. If you take it as an artwork and not as a Master program it can have the flexibility to change and mold, bring in different people and go to different cities. I think it's important to remember this distinction, of the SMS as a Master program but also as a bigger artwork.

How did you find the experience in São Paulo?

*ES:* I collaborated with Clare [Butcher] on a project regarding education and audience in the biennial. We proposed to do one thing, but when we were doing it, it turned out to be something completely different. Actually Liesbeth and Jos suggested us to do something regarding these aspects, as they were also interesting for us individually. Living together was very important to how we would work together. We didn't necessarily

collaborate as a group or anything, but we were always sharing material on each other projects.

I think that it wasn't the SMS when we were there, it was *Turning the Blind Eye*, and although we were there as such it was something completely different. Some of the topics came up during the thesis, which at that moment I hadn't realized had an impact on me. Working with Clare was great, but we were never together in person, as she was there during the first month and I was there during the second.

Being in a group is not easy, how did you undergo tense situations or internal conflicts amongst you?

ES: Something in common we all shared in the group is that we really like to dance. It might sound silly, but it was actually an important thing. As soon as someone was sad, unhappy, or homesick we would stop and play a song, dance it out for some minutes, and then go back to work. That was the best way to solve the anxiety, stress, and loneliness. As a group I think we were really good with being patient with each other. There are cultural differences we have to get used to. We learned how to negotiate each other's privacy within a very limited space. We all had a different way of working, but because we were all aware of this, in some way that kept us together. We also didn't expect to do everything together, and I think that's an important part when you are living with other people. I would like to think this experience helped us with our graduation show. We didn't have a curator, Liesbeth and Jos were away and our coordinator unavailable so we had to figure it out by ourselves, but it played out very smoothly. After São Paulo we were able to address any type of issues right away. I don't know if the rest feel the same way, I think it wasn't easy being there, but it did have a major impact on us as a group. Now I know I can live with 10 other people, which is something I never did before.

I think it's a Master program in which it's not necessarily the educational or professional aspect you develop, but it's more about becoming aware of yourself as a person. And then, with the particular topics that come up in each island, you have

to reflect on how you live your life.

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*“Thinking ‘academy’ as ‘potentiality’ is to think the possibilities of not doing, not making, not bringing into being at the very centre of acts of thinking, making and doing. It means dismissing much of the instrumentalising that seems to go hand in hand with education, much of the managerialism that is associated with a notion of ‘training’ for this or that profession or market.”<sup>1</sup>*

Why did you apply for this type of Master? What were your expectations for a Master that was only developed once, designed and thought through by artists? In what ways did you think it was going to be more experimental?

*Mariana Lanari* : I wasn’t looking for a Master when I applied for this program. I wanted to dedicate myself to be a full time artist and to make a change in my way of living. This was a support structure that allowed me to do that. I think in my case it’s important how I knew about this Master; I guess the environment influenced my perception. I met Liesbeth and Jos in a mobile residence that Capacete organized in the Amazon, in February 2013. I learned about the *School of Missing Studies* in a situation that seemed to me similar to what they were doing. It started in 2004, as a nomadic platform. They did projects in the Balkans and in New York, focused around urbanism, architecture and education, from a broader conception, with an interdisciplinary group of people.

I liked this contracted idea that leads to a personal reading and appropriation. What is a *school of missing studies*? Back then, I wanted to quit my job as an editor and dedicate time to reading *Finnegans Wake* as an artist. It seemed to be a perfect opportunity.

<sup>1</sup>. Rogoff, Irit, *Academy as Potentiality*, A.C.A.D.E.M.Y (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2006).

So you thought this program could match this type of research?

*ML*: Perfectly, yes. And it would be a way for me to change direction professionally. If you read the call, it was very open, it addressed many different people. They wanted to form an interdisciplinary group, the call was written in a way that spoke to people from different backgrounds. I think that's why I was accepted. I always worked in the art field but never as an artist, and that's what I wanted to try. How could I get such a degree with the background I had in a regular Fine Arts Master?

Initially I was interested in 2 things from the program: practices focused in the 'here and now' and to 'discuss and share possible methods to scout for information, which seems to flow freely in unbound space and through open networks', which is how my project with *Finnegans Wake* was articulated.

In relation to your research, did you find the way the Master was organized useful?

*ML*: I found it very good. I was not expecting something different to what they announced, for me it was all written down from the beginning. There were workshops with different themes. For me it was great to learn about different practices, not related directly with my research, with great theoretical input. I enjoyed in general Sandberg's structure, having access to all types of equipment, video and audio studios, the Rietveld ateliers, bookbinding, and printing. You almost don't realize how much you have in your hands when you are there.

What do you think about the island system? Did you find a relation between these topics or was that not so important for you?

*ML*: I didn't think of making relations between the islands [workshops]. It's like when you are at school, you have different disciplines, with the exception that these ones were concentrated over the span of 1 week. I found it great; you could really establish a connection with the people who came to teach, because they were here for a few days, sometimes twice or 3 times around the 20 years. We met interesting people, and even with tutors that gave me bad feedback, it was still useful.

It's important not to get affected by other people's judgments, I had many opportunities to learn that. There are also very practical things at stake, when you get into this kind of relation with people that come to see your work without any idea of who you are or what your work's about and judge you based on a 15 minutes conversation. This for me was one of the best trainings in the Master. Every time I presented my work differently. At the beginning of the second year, I realized I had to speak about it in 1 sentence, 1 word even, and from there I could start a conversation. I arrived to this conclusion after trying and not succeeding many times. People don't have time or interest, I learned I had to be short and precise in these occasions.

What about the discussions you maintained among the group?  
Were they useful to think about your own work or goals in this Master?  
What was the role of Liesbeth and Jos regarding this?

*ML* : I have 2 things to say about this. I tried not to get involved in the general moods regarding complaints about the program. There was in a way a current of complaining, in which I sometimes also participated, but it made me realize that it might also be that whatever you need to learn, hurts. Every time I took part in discussions, or made a complaint, I felt there was something hidden there, another kind of desire, there was something else maintaining this, rather than the subject itself. I think it had to do with expectations. Of course I was also disappointed or not so enthusiastic about some islands or topics, but you have to see the wider picture and profit from what is there in the moment.

Liesbeth and Jos were not very present in a daily relation with the students. They were of course very present as directors of the program, organizing the whole thing for 2 years, which is a big task. They would come twice a month, but we never had discussions with them that were not regarding something practical, like reading a text together, or discussing issues in general. When I had a problem with the way they were assessing or judging my work, I let them know and we found a way to solve it. But confrontation, healthy discussion

of things that were uncomfortable, was never an option. They had no time for that. They had more an authoritative presence, let's say.

As part of the program, the group spent two months in São Paulo during the Biennial, but you decided not to participate in this trip. What did you do instead?

*ML*: At that moment, before the trip, I got 2 grants to develop further my research on Joyce. So I decided not to go with the group and focus instead on my work. It was for a 2-month period, and it really didn't fit my goals. So I negotiated this with them and gave them a clear proposal of what I was going to develop instead. They were open to that and added a few requirements. This allowed me to make 'my' Master in that semester.

How did you see the group on their return and how did this decision change your experience of the Master?

*ML*: I was really glad I didn't go, as it transformed my Master. I offered a class at Sandberg, as an experiment. I had space to work, lots of time. I managed to take the best from this semester. If I had gone to São Paulo it would have been very distracting for me, as it is my hometown. Plus I would have had to work for their own project, which didn't make sense with what I was trying to achieve. I think this decision changed the way I went through the Master. I missed not being with the group in São Paulo, I totally missed what happened between them there, their dynamics and group experiences. They had many conflicts but they managed to solve all of them. I think it's a strong group, with very different personalities, but from the beginning there were affinities between everyone. I think Liesbeth and Jos did a really good job in selecting the people.

How did you feel about having to finish this Master with an exhibition, bearing in mind the fact that you didn't have a studio in which to develop your work during the two years? How did you combine all the theoretical input you received with your own work?

ML : This was something that can only be understood if you take into account all the elements together. You have to see the Master as something inscribed within an institution, within a city, and that's a whole system. The exhibition came as a requirement from Sandberg, we couldn't escape from it. Liesbeth and Jos were invited by the director of Sandberg to do this one time only Master, what they negotiated was that we were to obtain an MFA at the end. In order to have that you need to follow certain requirements. If I had the choice I wouldn't have participated in the exhibition, but I understood the necessity of it. These things never really gained clarity; I had to cope with it as it was happening. The exhibition was our final work, but it cannot be seen as the result of the practice of the two years. My reading of it is that I had to come up with something in 2 weeks that made sense with what I was researching, to fit an exhibition space. The original outline for the final semester was that each student should find the context for his or her practice, meaning also the space where it was going to be presented in public. I was working towards that in 2 different projects. One was an audio piece of the last and first chapter of *Finnegans Wake*, I did with Dutch composer Sjoerd Leijten, part of a project that set the whole book to music and played on the radio all around the world. And a project I'm currently working on at the Stedelijk Museum Library. Both make total sense with what I've been doing for the past years.

But 2 months before the graduation, Sandberg came up with the requirement of a group show at the Orphanage of Aldo Van Eyck. At first I didn't like the idea, the work I was doing didn't make sense in an exhibition space. I also didn't know the building well enough to understand what an opportunity it was. It is one of the most impressive buildings of Aldo van Eyck. At the end it was awesome to spend time there with my colleagues and, most importantly, to see for the first time what everybody else was working on.

*“Art education has always been faced with a confusion between art and craft: in teaching how to do things, one often neglects the more important question of what to do with them.”<sup>2</sup>*

What aspects of the Master caught your attention and why did you decide to apply?

*Luisa Ungar*: The open call drew my attention because it seemed to offer an interesting scenario connected to my work, asking about possible relations between public spaces, contemporary art practices and pedagogical experimentation. Although methodology and program were a bit uncertain, it offered clues to approach those issues, for example they gave an important role to the notion of ‘otherness’ as a key word in their approach; I was dealing with that in my practice back in Colombia, mainly with communities outside the so-called art scenarios.

What expectations did you have considering the framework of a unique Master program developed as part of a nomadic artistic project of a Dutch collective?

*LU*: The call emphasized the need to address what they defined as urgent questions of society, those which ‘were missing from other programs’. I was interested in a program that would question roles of artistic practice in the so-called concrete social and political issues within an interdisciplinary group, and how different forms of knowledge production can be applied when experimenting with this. The fact that it was interdisciplinary offered a scenario to get to know various ways of working with the issues mentioned before.

From the beginning, a basic question for me was about that voice which grants itself the power of deciding that which is missing. This is a natural concern in Colombia, where these questions have been discussed widely in the art field in terms of a colonial heritage that is still present. In this sense,

2. Camnitzer, Luis, *Art and Literacy*, e-flux journal #3, 02/2009.

I thought this could be an interesting laboratory also in connection with the ‘socially engaged practices’. A constant issue among students related to what you mention, the challenges and contradictions implied in the fact that this was an artistic project in itself. What role do the students play then? Who are they working for? This was not clear for me before entering the program.

So for you this Master would be more experimental, in the sense that you wouldn’t be developing any particular skill but trying to combine your practice with their theoretical input?

*LU*: Well, unconventional frames do not necessarily imply the use of experimental methodologies, or the practice of experimentation. Nor do they imply questioning structures or mechanisms of learning or making art. In that sense the relation between discourse and practice was for me always one of the main issues, and it is symptomatic of how some types of art tend to function. How certain discourses seem to have replaced the experience of the making, or how others can play specific roles when justifying in an ethical sense the importance of a specific practice. For example, there was not a clear place in the schedule for experimenting with creative processes as a possible producer of knowledge, but there was a strong presence of discourses approaching those issues.

Was there a chance to compare how public space is seen and used in São Paulo and in Holland? Or to compare both contexts after living there for two months?

*LU*: We did get to know, speak and listen to people actively working around urban issues in São Paulo. There was not a specific question as such that could be followed as a critical inquiry during those months. It was more about a general approach, and there was also no specific time in the schedule to continue the discussion after the trip, this was done in an informal way during the different gatherings. In São Paulo’s SMS and in the context of the biennial, the issue that I brought up before about the authority implied in the voice that defines what ‘is missing’

in a particular community, was again significant for me. Who decides what needs to 'be fixed' and what does art have to do with that, how to make that inquiry not only a discursive one; how do you recognize what Suely Roelnik calls 'discomfort'. However, there was a lot of discussion around the program itself, and this I found interesting. For example one of my colleagues compared the apparent absence of pre-established defined rules in public space in some areas of São Paulo with the importance of knowing the rules in such an educational structure in order to avoid unnecessary stress and surprise.

Coming back to an alternative Master and ways of learning, how did the methods to structure the program work for you?

*LU*: For me it was an interesting experience to see how these alternative models are functioning and what that says about the artistic and educational fields in a situation of economic emergency as the one taking place now. Going back to that notion of 'Otherness' that was mentioned in the open call, for example, to see how much of that was being practiced on the mechanisms used when developing this program or that type of work. What happens with an educational model that doesn't privilege the development of specific skills or experimentation? In this sense it is symptomatic that the seminars were referred to as 'Islands', you could jump from one to the other, but there was not a particular space in the schedule for the practice or the experimentation. What happens when certain rules are not clear, and how new structures generate other types of rules, with their own complicated relations as well.

Why do you think there is a contradiction between theory and practice? What do you mean with that?

*LU*: This has to do with opacity. For example, when art is required to have a specific relation towards concrete social and political issues, it may be framed in a way where it would seem to be obsessed with transparency, as if it was possible to make clean translations from something called reality through the work, or didactically explain what the work is about without

even needing the work. That relation comes with an ethical subtext that draws us back to the issue of the voice that is behind the definition of what needs to be fixed. Whose interests are at stake? I think this Master program is symptomatic of the state of contemporary art education, where a space for experimentation without specific labeling is difficult to find.

Leaving aside the symbolic arena and moving towards a real scenario?

LU: Well, one of the challenges with this type of education experiment is about the place that is given to experimentation, how to defend the fact that such experimentation is also a laboratory for reflection for example. How not to reproduce academic systems that are now being applied from other disciplines (such as social sciences), without listening to what art has to say as a practice. The assumption that there is such thing as a 'real scenario' as a duty for art might be dangerous in terms of humor or fiction, and it is connected with the loss of artistic experimentation as such.

[Jaques] Rancière's book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* exemplifies some of these assumptions; rather than sitting and explaining to his French speaking students how to speak a new language (Dutch), Professor Jacotot gives them the tools: dictionary and the original Dutch text. This is relevant in terms of the relation between explanation and discourse as opposed to practice and experimentation in education, but also in relation to the issue of the skills that I mentioned before. You might interpret that Professor Jacotot breaks a hierarchical system between him and the students by implementing a new methodology which doesn't imply to leave the classroom, brake pencils or things like that. It's just about revising the way they work, and this is also what I mean with contradiction, how to question the how and not only the what. I think this Master program speaks a lot about the state of contemporary art, and where the place for artistic education lies, or if it is diffused, blurred, misplaced.





*A speech from horseback at sunset*, 2014. Performance.  
Image courtesy of the artist. Photo by Moosje Moti Goosen.

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**Clare Butcher, (50)**

is a teacher, writer and cook from Zimbabwe based for the moment in Amsterdam.

**Francisco Camacho, (44)**

is a visual artist from Colombia based in Antwerp and Amsterdam.

**Juan Canela, (80)**

is a Spanish independent curator and writer. From 2013-2015 he co-curated with *Azotea Lesson O*, a long-term curatorial project for Espai13, Fundació Miró, Barcelona.

**Renata Cervetto, (7, 40, 70, 90, 142)**

is an Argentinian art historian and researcher. She was a Curatorial Fellow at de Appel arts centre in 2013-14.

**Etcétera..., (22)**

is a multidisciplinary collective formed in 1997 in Buenos Aires. Federico Zukerfeld and Loreto Garín Guzmán, cofounders, coordinate its archive, exhibitions and educational activities.

**Charles Esche, (40)**

is a curator and writer and Director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven.

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is a Portuguese visual artist based in Rotterdam.

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is a Brazilian artist, educator and researcher. Between 2006-2014, she was the Coordinator of the Mercosul Biennial Education Program.

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is an architect, visual artist, and a producer living in and out of Palestine.

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**Mariana Lanari, (142)**

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is a Mexican artist and curator.

**Sabina Sabolović, (22)**

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The Fellow Reader #1  
On Boycott, Censorship and Educational Practices.

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*About the Curatorial Fellowship*

The Curatorial Fellowship Program offers one alumnus of the Curatorial Program the possibility to explore the notion of 'curating the audience' in greater depth, while also creating a connection between two program years. During her fellowship, Renata Cervetto curated two round tables, *Hello, My Name is Boycott* (de Balie, Amsterdam, 4 December, 2014), *Before and After Censorship* (de Balie, Amsterdam, 21 March, 2015); and a two-day symposium *Surrounding Education. Towards New Integrations with the Curatorial and Artistic Fields* (TAAK, Amsterdam, 6-7 June, 2015). The Fellowship is part of a long-term research project, which is supported by the Ammodo Foundation.

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