



Counter-Production

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“ The clashing of first and second nature, of life and technology, of difference and repetition inscribes the fracture line of the counter into the very body of the work of art ...”

For a Topic of Counterproduction

Sebastian Egenhofer

1. Counterproduction

Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt guided their arguments along the fracture line between the bourgeois *public sphere* and a *proletarian* one that does not yet exist. They chose as their theme the flip side of the element of social self-reflection studied genealogically by Habermas:¹ namely, the *proletarian experience*, which in the medium of the established public sphere and culture can only find representation that is distorted by capital's valorization interest. If we observe the basic schema of the often sprawling analyses of *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* (translated as *Public Sphere and Experience*),² it is often structured according to a series of classical dichotomies whose core is formed by the opposition of production and exchange: the proletarian experience, largely determined by living work, is involved in the materiality of its situation. Its concretion and local specificity conflict with the relationship of the owner's individual interests—as it is mediated by the market and the law of exchange—to a horizon of generality. The potential universality of the relationship of exchange—which subsumes all local experience of resistance—is recognized as the model of conceptual universality in general, in the classical argument of critical theory.³ The translation of the quality of an experience tied to its material circumstances into the public sphere structured by its quantity can only be achieved by leveling it. Because the forms of, say, discursive language⁴ and the norms of private law⁵ are determined in part by the abstract relationship of exchange, proletarian experience remains an incommensurable dark backdrop for the bourgeois public sphere: a “thing-in-itself” or the “block of real life that goes against the valorization interest.”⁶ The task of a politically aware production of culture would hence be to create forms of a public sphere that permit this experience of undistorted and nonreductive self-reflection and political self-organization—or at least prepare them under the given conditions of cultural hegemony of the owners' class by breaking up the “illusory public sphere [by means of] the counterproducts of a proletarian sphere.”⁷

2. Liquefaction

It seems to be common sense today that this dichotomous basic structure, naturally only roughly outlined here, is no longer analytically viable. That realization did not begin with Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's study *The New Spirit of Capitalism*⁸ and the theories of post-Fordism that are currently making the rounds on the art scene.⁹ Michel Foucault's definition

of “power” as a productive, nonrepressive factor and the insistence of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on the creative dimension of the movement of capital—which, by remaining blind or unconscious, nevertheless generates difference—already made such an opposition dubious. Life—in its unrepeatability as lived time—does not conflict with capital in the same way as do living, concrete labor and its product of the use value of “mere congelations of undifferentiated human labour” that is the measure of exchange values.¹⁰ The seemingly massive “block of real life that goes against the valorization interest”¹¹ of Kluge and Negt is informed down to its affective and unconscious dimension and, in a sense, *in part produced* by this interest in valorization. The movement of capital—Marx himself clearly alluded to this “civilizing” dimension in the *Grundrisse*¹²—confronts life not as an authority of standardization and disqualification, as the specific experience of the consumer society of the 1950s and 1960s that led to the crisis of legitimacy of the 1960s may seem to have suggested. Rather, it has long since completely cut life off from its natural needs (to which necessary use values would correspond) and has created cultural, artificial, fictive needs and desires that diversified production provides the means to satisfy. All the more so, post-Fordist capitalism—which in the analysis of Boltanski and Chiapello sublated, in the finest Hegelian sense, the 1960s critique in the name of creativity and individual lifestyles—can of course no longer be identified as a monolithic opponent of abstract rationality. Capital’s valorization interest has become limber and fluid enough to intervene in a radically fissured social life in order to organize it. It appeals to the creation of difference; it produces simulacra of preindustrial forms of production and historicity. If we take into account that the overwhelming majority of the world’s population today, and increasingly strata of the population in affluent Western societies as well, are abandoned not to proletarianization but to pauperization, to unvalorizability, we might suppose that this constellation will produce new contours of an “enemy,” who will then be identified politically and socially (rather than remaining definable as an abstract power of capital).

3. The Desire for Resistance

Despite this often acknowledged liquefaction of the opponent, the maxim of an oppositional or critical character of art and theory remains hegemonic for its part in the field of cultural production itself—at least in the segment in which we find ourselves here. The models of resistance are, as the present exhibition shows, extremely diversified: a slipping of the art market’s interest in valorization by changing the forms of distribution—while retaining a sector of exclusive and singular products—in the oeuvre of Seth Price; the half bohemian-intellectual, half infantile-regressive daydreaming in the work of Josef Strau; Mary Ellen Carroll’s senselessly rotating a house 180 degrees, which cannot even (like Gordon Matta-Clark’s interventions) be exploited as a photogenic antiarchitectural gesture; and the deconstruction and undermining of representative codes that produce identity in the works of Josephine Pryde and Lili Reynaud-Dewar. The techniques for critiquing standards and the attempts to produce or signal incommensurability are diverse; however, they scarcely pretend to integrate a collective dimension. The current production of art is not working toward a counterpublic or an alternative public—as an element of producing the formation of a new collective political subject; it is located in an exclusive segment of the established

public that is borne by exhibition institutions, art criticism, and a speculative art market. It is clear that in this element the real and concrete experience that has gone into the production of works and is expressed in their form is subjected to secondary coding. It seems to me this is particularly true in the context of debates on post-Fordism. Artistic praxis does not “resist” the regime of the liquefied capitalism; it refers to the discourse of social theory—from Foucault to Giorgio Agamben, from Antonio Negri to Boltanski and Chiapello—that places the constellation of capital and life at the center of its analysis, as a quasi-iconographic subtext. That is clearly associated with the risk that resistance will become unproblematically consumable as a distinguishing characteristic of cultural production. It is no longer realized and experienced in its actuality but rather signaled and decoded as signal, and hence valorized as cultural meaning. Political engagement is transformed into the signified “politicity”¹³ and documentary or archival work into the trademark of being serious and well grounded. Even flirting with nonexclusive forms of distribution (as practiced by Seth Price) is integrated into the profile of the name that supports the monopoly.¹⁴ An effect beyond the self-reflexive field of current cultural production does not even seem to be intended.

4. The Permanence of the Model

One can therefore ask what the source is of the permanence of the topos of the antithesis of art and theoretical and socioeconomic rationality. It is evident that it has decisively bourgeois roots. Immanuel Kant’s theorizing that aesthetic judgment is a judgment “without concepts” introduced a tradition—most effectively interrupted by Hegel’s integration of art into the history of Spirit coming to itself—of defining art as a placeholder for the (conceptually and economically) incommensurable. This function can have a pedagogical and therapeutic tinge, as it does in Kant and explicitly in Friedrich Schiller, for both of whom the dichotomy between the crude sensuousness that is supposed to be made pliant for the concept during the play of aesthetic experience and cultivated rationality is transparent with respect to the social paradigm of class difference (as Bourdieu demonstrated in extenso). In modernism, at least, it is usually laden with a large burden of compensation justified by reference to the history of philosophy. For example, Heidegger contrasts *poesis*—as a producing in harmony with the unforced “arising” of the *physis*¹⁵—with instrumental technology that reduces the natural and historical entity to the calculable state of the given, whereas Adorno defines art as a representative of the nonidentical—of a nature that does not yet exist.¹⁶ These models are united by the fact that they attribute to art a resistance to instrumental rationality, to the dominance of the categorical and mechanical dictate of identity. In the preserve of art, “nature”—however abstractly it is defined—emerges in a form that reveals, among other things, precisely that it is not manufactured and not intended.¹⁷ In my view, this systematic positioning of art, which has become established in philosophy and art theory over the past two centuries, still motivates the current taste for the antithesis that has lost an identifiable opposite. Resistance is a signifier of art itself—*for* the public sphere (we need not call it bourgeois but it is certainly not proletarian) that refers to that segment of cultural production.

5. Passivity and Production

This classical function of resistance can be understood as counterproductive if we define production as the application and prevailing of categorical and technical-mechanical standards in the foundation of difference that is nature (of the *not made* or *physis*). Because art remains receptive in a different way to the passivity of the relationship to this unavailable dimension, it can and must be defined as an aspect of an interruption of standardized (repetitive) production. However, even the most restrictive and controlled production cannot be relieved of such a relationship. The grid of standards alone would remain—as Kant said of the concept without intuition—empty. The repetition of the same by means of technical-mechanical application is for its part dependent on self-yielding, on the influx of an unrepeatability in or with time. The applied identity will thus break down in strictly serial production (and in the transcendental constitution of representationalism) because of the space-time facticity of how it is executed and be scattered in diversity. Perhaps, therefore, the manner in which art is—in its characteristic programmatic passivity—opened to this facticity, to an existing sensory materiality, to the irreversible course of time, can just as easily be defined as another mode of productivity. It seems to me that we can identify in a series of cases in high modernism such a model of the interlocking of passivity and production. In the abstraction of Malevich and Mondrian, for example, the perspectival perception of reality—the objective world—was defined in general as the product of standardization guided by vital interests, and that abstract painting retracted this. The abstract painting was defined as a structure of reception that translated nonobjective (aperspectival) being into appearance but does not yet pour it out into a horizon of possibilities of human action and deform it into perspectival appearance—the correlate of “hunger” is the desire for prey (Malevich) or the reflex of the “tragic” isolation of the individual (Mondrian). Artistic production that accompanies the primordial translation of nonobjectivity into abstract aperspectival appearance more than it achieves cannot therefore be defined as “labor,” as Malevich insisted it should be.¹⁸ Its productivity is tied to the law of inertia and is unintentional participation in the “flow of life,” in the “sloth” of God, or in the “planless dominion of nature.”¹⁹ The *pathein*, the passive connection to the unavailable—from the receptivity of the senses to artistic production conceived as inertia, an inertia that does not break the progress of time down into goals distributed in space but rather experiences it as the impulse of life itself—need not therefore be defined as an interruption of production but rather may just as well be defined as productivity of a higher order.

6. First and Second Nature

It can therefore be regarded as the traditional definition of the work of art that it is a place where this pathic connection to the incommensurable takes place. In terms of this definition as well, the definition of art is on the threshold between standardizing terminology (identity, repetition, exchange) and a life that is passively involved in reality and—here the connection to the current discussion of post-Fordist capitalism and the disappearing preserves of nonlabor should be made—gives in to its own movement. The question is how this passive

movement is translated into a product and preserved in it, how it can be communicated intersubjectively. It is clear that the forms of such transfer established in the modern era—intensified sensuousness, opacity of the signifier, aesthetic experience tied to space and time—have not simply become obsolete. It is, however, just as clear that an empathetic sensuousness and materiality or moments of emphasized loss of control can just as easily be secondarily coded and transformed into mere signals of themselves as an artistic practice, however committed to authenticity, politics, and society it may be, and can congeal from the perspective of the reception of art to a feature of the profile of the signifier. The actual impact of elemental nature becomes the signifier of primitiveness; the trace that has gotten out of control becomes the emblem of the involuntary; and contingency exhibited becomes its own exemplary pattern. Passive movement, which is the only possible connection to the unavailable, is shut down in the product and prepared for an intentional access. That can only be avoided if this movement affects the form of the work as a whole and converges with its historical facticity and determinacy. The progress of time (lived time, the time of *physis*), which is experienced in sensory affection and hence in the materiality of the aesthetic signifier, must be seen as the thrust of the existence of the work in general, lest it congeal into the isolated trophy of immediacy. The structures of mediation and framing that stabilize the sensory phenomenon must therefore be integrated in turn into the form of the work. The materiality of the aesthetic signifier is constituted at the point of intersection between sensory immediacy and the historical apparatuses of mediation and reproduction.²⁰ That can also be revealed in the opposite way when the apparatuses themselves—second nature—are exposed in their own materiality and historicity, as is done—to mention an example not included in this exhibition—in the work of Christopher Wool. Here a blot, a drip of paint—reminiscent of the painting linked to existential expression for which the name Jackson Pollock stands—is fed into a kaleidoscope of reproduction techniques in order to refract in it. Much as in the work of Seth Price, the product has overlapping traces of efforts to mediate, traces of reworking and replicating, which only get just enough experiential raw material for the tools to be able to demonstrate both their efficiency and their own tendency to break down. Thus it becomes possible to experience the fragility of this second nature—which is supposed to support the repetition, the circulation of identity—as such. The clashing of first and second nature, of life and technology, of difference and repetition, inscribes the fracture line of the counter into the very body of the work of art, into a body that, as the bearer of this rift, eludes the shutdown in the present and the siphoning off of a meaning. Counterproduction, an act of resistance against identifying thinking that has become fluid and filigreed, succeeds when it constitutes its product, the work of art, as a place and event of immanent incommensurability.

Notes

- 1 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989 [orig. 1962]). Habermas's book is a constant point of reference for Kluge and Negt's argument.
- 2 Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993 [orig. 1972]).

- 3 Alfred Sohn-Rethel in particular has attempted to show in many analyses that real abstraction (commodity form) is the historical a priori of the transcendental subject and the categorical apparatus by means of which it processes sensory-material experience; see Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Geistige und körperliche Arbeit: Zur Epistemologie der abendländischen Geschichte* (Weinheim: VCH, Acta Humaniora, 1989).
- 4 On the “blocking” of proletarian experience by means of the linguistic standards of the bourgeois public sphere, see Kluge and Negt, *Public Sphere and Experience*, pp. 45–49.
- 5 Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 10.
- 6 Kluge and Negt, *Public Sphere and Experience*, pp. xlvi, 57.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 79–80.
- 8 Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 2005 [orig. 1999]).
- 9 I will mention only Julieta Aranda, Anton Vidokle, and Brian Kuan Wood, *Are You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2011), and Christoph Menke and Juliane Rebentisch, *Kreation und Depression: Freiheit im gegenwärtigen Kapitalismus* (Berlin: Kulturverlag Kamos, 2010).
- 10 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. S. Moore and E. Aveling (New York: International Publishers, 1967), p. 67.
- 11 Kluge and Negt, *Public Sphere and Experience*, p. 57.
- 12 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage, 1973), pp. 408–409.
- 13 Roland Barthes’s model is still a useful tool when analyzing this transposition from the level of experience and contact with reality to that of secondary (“mythical”) meaning; see Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972 [orig. 1957]), pp. 109–159.
- 14 Thierry de Duve describes the reaction of the nineteenth-century market for painting to the efficiency of photography as an effort to form a monopoly: “First the market for painting separated from that of images at large, then the market of the avant-garde, then of a particular avant-garde, and of a particular artist. Each name is a little monopoly. In a monopoly situation, the price of a commodity is not determined by its exchange-value; only supply and demand operate.” Thierry de Duve, “Andy Warhol; or, The Machine Perfected,” *October* 48 (Spring 1989): pp. 3–14, esp. p. 11.
- 15 See Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 10.
- 16 See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997 [orig. 1970]), p. 173.
- 17 The proximity of Heidegger’s and Adorno’s thinking on art is evident precisely in this feature.
- 18 Kazimir Malevich, “Ökonomische Gesetze,” in *Am Nullpunkt: Positionen der russischen Avantgarde*, ed. Boris Groys and Aage Hansen-Löve (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), pp. 514–522, esp. p. 516.
- 19 See Kazimir Malevich, “From Cubism to Futurism and Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting,” in *Essays on Art, 1915–28*, ed. Troels Andersen, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1978), pp. 21, 25; “Sloth: The Real Truth of Humanity,” in *The Artist, Infinity, Suprematism: Unpublished Writings 1913–1933*, ed. Troels Andersen, trans. Xenia Hoffmann (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1978), pp. 73–85; *Suprematismus: Die gegenstandslose Welt*, ed. W. Haftmann (Cologne: DuMont, 1989), p. 68.
- 20 I have discussed in greater detail the temporal schema of the materiality of the signifier and its irreducible historicity in Sebastian Egenhofer, “Aesthetic Materiality in Conceptualism,” in *Aesthetics and Contemporary Art*, ed. Armen Avanessian and Luke Skrebowski (Berlin: Sternberg, 2011), pp. 87–99, and “Zum Begriff der Wahrheitsproduktion: Heidegger mit Spinoza,” in *Produktionsästhetik* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2010), pp. 165–224, esp. pp. 207–212.

“ In order to stage the relationships and correspondences between subject , knowledge, and field, I propose viewing ‘making art’ as a contingent ‘ready-made score,’ the protocol of a drama ...”

Project Proposal (The Work Is How to Become an Artist)

Johannes Porsch

If one assumes that the “the artist” is one of today’s prototypes of the entrepreneurial self, artistic knowledge production is a form of symbolic-value creation, and the art field is considered a privileged social segment, I would like to ask: How can this form of subjectivization—“the artist”—and this form of knowledge production—“making art”—be critically investigated within artistic sign production itself? In order to stage the relationships and correspondences between subject, knowledge, and field, I propose viewing “making art” as a contingent “ready-made score,” the protocol of a drama, within which the subject, drawn by the desire of producing signs and meaning, itself becomes a sign within this production and is signified by the context and conditions of signification. As a consequence, the artist-subject’s impulse to articulate—to produce signs—is based on a collective belief in the art field’s reality, its logics, economies, and regimes. To consider “making art” as a “ready-made score” therefore means being able to participate in a sort of “specific code, simultaneously juridical and communicative, whose cognition and recognition constitute the veritable right of entry into the field.”¹

“I was always interested in the problem of being an artist [...] more than any specific medium”²—“[I run an exhibition space and bar], which [I use] to elaborate the more ephemeral aspects of [my] regular studio work. Social relations are treated as stimulating and destructive, they force [you] into situations [you] normally avoid and provide opportunities [you] never expected. [I have] said on more than one occasion that ‘sometimes an object’s history can be unfolded and sometimes the object enfolds you, takes over your body and you’re just a kind of zombie.’ But [I do] admit that it’s mostly [my] fault if [I] end up in this position—a bit mute, surrounded and a part of something. Or if I’m in an empowered position, I say that’s my fault too.”³ “It always seems to me... I mean, everything I do is... The work is how to become an artist.”⁴ I propose an enactment of this passage, exemplifying the subject position of “becoming an artist,” that strategically uses its affirmative posture, the pursuit of recognition, to explore fissures and cracks, gaps and sutures, within the field of art and folds them back into artistic production (including the production of the artist).

“The field of art can be described as split within itself between its being as an autonomous and differentiated field in the context of other fields, and its consciousness as totality. This is the root of its ideological blindness as well as the potential it lends to its critical employment. Precisely as an autonomous and differentiated field, moreover, it overlaps with other fields, with which it constantly exchanges needs and codes.”⁵ Autonomy does indeed

produce temporary “spaces exempt from the social structures of commercial exploitation,”⁶ but these spaces are “never blank slates, neutral and ready for use”;⁷ they are “ideologically coded and connoted.”⁸ Their critical employment thus runs the risk of reproducing “these very ideological aspects.”⁹ This means that it must “address [...] the rifts within the field,”¹⁰ “the interrelation of autonomy and heteronomy and of professionalized specificity and the claim to totality.”¹¹ This form of critique “exists as a realization of the division engendered by the institution of art as we know it today: the division of the field of culture into specialized and quotidian production and consumption, without which autonomous art would not exist; the division of the institution of art into the subject and the object of artistic investigations engendered by the self-critique of the historic avant-gardes.”¹² This form of critique “embodies this division, which we, too, have internalized, and contains its irreducibility in its rejection of projections (the ‘outside,’ the ‘everyday’) and idealizations (myths of artistic radicalness and creative omnipotence).”¹³ This form of critique draws on the figure of a double rift within the field of art, which is “simultaneously specific and totalitarian, autonomous and heteronomous,”¹⁴ and concludes that critique “takes place site-specifically and reflectively”¹⁵ when it focuses on the formations of power and forms of production that are inherent to its “direct field of operation”;¹⁶ therein lies its political praxis and its “practical principle.”¹⁷ Yet this political praxis does not proceed without complications, for its “practical principle” aims at a change of the conditions, which means “[an intervention] in the realization of these conditions.”¹⁸ But an intervention into the “implementation of conditions”¹⁹ implies participation and hence complicity. The mutual interpenetration of critical intervention and complicity, an ambivalent mode of critique, might thus unfold the continuous logic of a field constituted by a “double rift.” The social conditions are not “out there”²⁰ in everyday “sites and situations”;²¹ even less is a social field exclusively “institutionalized in organizations and manifest in objects. Above all it is internalized, embodied, and presented in what Pierre Bourdieu called habitus: the competences, dispositions, forms of perception and praxis, the interests and ambitions that define both our membership in the field and our ability to produce effects in it. We are the institution of art: the object of our critiques, our attacks, is always also within ourselves.”²² Still, this argument, which thinks of the social as folded, by the structured and structuring relationship between the subject and the conditions of relations of power, into a field, is marked by an insurmountable opposition between inside and outside: “But just as art cannot exist outside the field of art, we cannot exist outside the field of art, at least not as artists, critics, curators, etc. And what we do outside the field, to the extent that it remains outside, can have no effect within it. So if there is no outside for us, it is not because the institution is perfectly closed, or exists as an apparatus in a ‘totally administered society,’ or has grown all-encompassing in size and scope.”²³ “It is because the institution is inside of us, and we can’t get outside of ourselves.”²⁴ Yes, in this sense, “the work is how to become an artist.”²⁵

Notes

- 1 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).
- 2 Liam Gillick, *La Biennale di Venezia 2009*, directed by Ralph Goertz (2009), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4EVR_39KyQ (accessed August 2, 2012).
- 3 "art or life: aesthetics and biopolitics," Galerie Meyer Kainer, Vienna, curated by Will Benedict (2012), <http://www.curatedby.at/en/curators/items/galerie-meyer-kainer.html> (accessed August 17, 2012).
- 4 Gillick, *La Biennale di Venezia 2009*.
- 5 Helmut Draxler, "Kunst und...", in *Gefährliche Substanzen. Zum Verhältnis von Kunst und Kritik* (Berlin: b_books, 2007), p. 61. (Trans. by Gerrit Jackson.)
- 6–11 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- 12 Andrea Fraser, "Was ist Institutionskritik?," in *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 59 (September 2005): p. 89. (Trans. by Gerrit Jackson.)
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 14 Draxler, "Kunst und...", p. 62.
- 15 Fraser, "Was ist Institutionskritik?," pp. 88–89.
- 16–22 *Ibid.*
- 23 Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2006), pp. 130–131.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Gillick, *La Biennale di Venezia 2009*.

“ But no one has the right to speculate from within the art field; this is not a place from which to look at the future —the contemporary artist lives and produces problems as part of a radical present ... and to work for its emergence is one of the main tasks ...”

Post-Participatory Participation

Ricardo Basbaum

"Who, me?"

"Yes, we were already expecting you."

"When I invite people to take part in some of my propositions, what am I offering them and what is expected from them, from me, for me, for them?" This should be a basic question addressed to participatory processes, which would help to indicate more precisely how this or that project is building the image of the artist and its other, the so-called participant. There was a time when artists did not conceive of their practice as a gesture toward someone else: it was enough that the art piece had been completed and had its internal aspects resolved. There wasn't even space for interpretation: before modernism, the "reading" of the piece pointed to a nonambiguous narrative. During modernism, however, the structure itself of artistic language guaranteed that the artwork would function correctly by pointing to the future, bringing forward advanced critical topics. But somehow in the mid-1950s a shift occurred—toward a sort of "participatory condition" of contemporary society—that was meant to decenter the artistic gesture and add a new role into the art system or circuit: that of the active participator, a figure of otherness who would not only become more and more relevant for art processes but would also decisively influence the shift from critical to curatorial practices at the end of the twentieth century.

Yes, Marcel Duchamp considered that the reception of his work would influence its meaning, but he was more concerned about the impact that an anonymous and general mass of people (that is, an "audience") would have on his place in *history*. He did not write specifically on the production or negotiation of the subject; that topic would only surface later in the art debate in general, in conversations in the 1980s around micropolitics and the politics of the subject. So while it is true that his famous *Mariée* portrays in fact a subjectification process (*she* and the tireless bachelors)—there is a flow of desire that energizes *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–23) and the pages of *The Green Box* (1934)—our position looking at the Glass is like sitting in a classic movie theater: the plot and the process are happening somewhere else and have no direct relation to us (as voyeurs), unless we (as obsessive thinkers) integrate the Glass's mechanism into ourselves. But that we would only do later, as contemporary participators: one of the main aspects of the participatory protocols, not yet in place then, refers to the reenactment of the work's process by the viewer, as a paradoxical internalization process, where one's subjectivity is built up by the artwork—which is at the same time activated by him or her. Despite this, yes, "Doctor MD"¹ was in fact one step ahead of his colleagues and did open

up a small area in his practice where the other became just barely visible, as a pale shade or a specter that in the future would become a giant impossible to ignore.

The significant shift, which came in the second half of the century, can be traced from at least three different sources, each of which affected the field of the symbolic and changed the “pact” that determines the art field and its roles—in the sense that the positions of not only the artist and viewer but also the critic, historian, curator, etc. were affected and had to be reframed. On one side, structuralism and anthropology decentered the role of the producer and receiver of knowledge, which had been played typically by the white European male, and it became apparent that much of the planet already had reacted against Eurocentrism by developing other modernisms, and thereby in many aspects jumped directly into the discussion of alternative centers. At the same time, the Macy Conferences on Cybernetics in New York (1946–53) established a proto-diagrammatic comprehension of the relational and communicational patterns of human society, instituting a mediation zone where the body, living beings, machines, and cultural artifacts would share common layers and lines of contact.² According to the topics proposed by this conference, sensorial experience would not return directly to the inner self but would instead surface as external layers and lines that could be prospectively modeled—we can see Lygia Clark’s “organic line,” a concept she first articulated in 1954, as related (although indirectly) to this development, as she “discovered” the border or line of mediation as the result of the contact of two different surfaces: body and object or artwork.³ Finally, we can refer to Umberto Eco and his text *The Open Work* (1962) and Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser’s aesthetics of reception (*Rezeptionsästhetik*) in literature in the late 1960s, which set out a concrete and definite role for the recipient actor of a text’s symbolic production, and argued that the author merely indicates a process to come, as the achievement of a literary experience that will only arrive through a “creative” gesture from this reader or viewer, who can complete the work and without whom the piece remains just a potential promise.

Of course, we could sum up other aspects that contributed to this turning point, but what these share is an awareness about deconstructing certain dominant and for a long time unchangeable models of subjecthood, and subsequently the bringing of the very mechanics of this process to the art field. And at the same time, there was also the improvement of the implementation of a communicative model (and the reaction to it) that brought to the map (or diagram) of the art field further positions (or points) that related to the interfaces between art and its context (society, science, the subject, the public, the economy, etc.)—defining the art circuit or system in even more explicit terms. In fact, it has today become commonplace to refer to the art circuit or system as a natural entity, so used (*wø*) the art practitioners have become to dealing with layers of mediation: any gesture requires being part of a project; having a budget; calling for advertising, press, license fees; engaging with museology, security, etc. That is, making art entails a permanent state of negotiation with many nodes of the circuit network—so that reaching the actual artwork is only possible after outrunning mediator after mediator, layer after layer; ultimately, what can be considered an artwork is a cluster of multiple explicit interests, including, fortunately, the artists’ proposals.

Some clear moments in this midcentury process can be found among the many gestures that characterized the several conceptualisms (including orthodox Conceptual art) then current worldwide: this was a particular and highly influential moment of collective thinking, which relied completely on the already conquered (but still open and full of potential) area of the presence of the participant other—most of the propositions dealt directly with discursive standards (though achieved by defined material elements), which were launched onto the viewer as a task, a work-to-do, a problem to solve—that is, he or she would be invited to engage in complex duties and operations to make the work produce sense. Conceptualism made clear that the viewer produced by the artistic operation is not a simple, ordinary, and neutral one: the artists realized that one of their main tasks was to work in the direction of modeling the subject who would receive their production. This *imperative* (i.e., the artwork's demand for its other) was indeed perceived as too important and decisive to be left in the hands of the market, consumption, and other directed social processes. The system of art (and in fact Conceptualism has always been concerned with the drafting of systems, maps, and diagrams) has, since then, constituted this *site* of the expected other—which also has several grades of *specificity*. Different moments of contemporary art can be reviewed in terms of the investment in what we might call an *expected-spectator production process*—although this is not a field for causal or linear results (which can be quite naive in the face of the complexity and importance of the problem).

In the 1950s, the Concrete and Neoconcrete movements in Brazil established their main conceptual lines under the new “epistemological” condition that considered the presence of the viewer or reader as part of the poetics triggered by the artwork. Not that there was a special perception of the problem among Brazilian artists and intellectuals (indeed, at the same time in France Yves Klein was proposing *Le Vide* [The Void, 1958], which contains a similar preoccupation with dissolving everything previous to the reception of the work, forcing the viewer to rebuild him or herself in direct contact with it),⁴ but some particular aspects of that moment are important for today's landscape and should be examined in further depth. Both groups, at various points, acknowledged their debt to Oswald de Andrade's “Manifesto Antropófago” of 1928: there is no doubt that this strong modern statement was a decisive step in reconfiguring the local culture as international, in the sense of recognizing difference, feeding from it, and producing the new—no longer as a subservient other but as a full voice charged with the potential for invention.⁵ It is not incorrect to link this modernist piece of resistance (several other modern Brazilian artists and writers from the same epoch turned to more conservative positions) with a particular sensitivity to a more close and direct involvement of the viewer and reader in terms of the activation of the artwork: if, on one side, the poet and essayist Haroldo de Campos was recognized by Umberto Eco as having anticipated similar theoretical ideas on the incompleteness of the artwork (which later resulted in his theories about translation), on the other, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, and Hélio Oiticica pursued highly inventive and experimental research that meant they entered the 1960s and '70s with an open consideration of the participant as a necessary part of the artistic gesture. But one more point is important to note: both movements still saw themselves as avant-garde actors, organizing their actions

and statements as manifestos and fighting for the right place in history—that is, defending a final truth within the field of modern art. (The Concrete and Neoconcrete groups were notorious for their battles.) In that sense, it is important to emphasize that so-called participation entered the discussion as an avant-garde topic, and as such was modeled—particularly in Brazil, in this historical moment—under the influence of the “pedagogy of the avant-garde”: no concessions at all to the general public, to common sense, or to the market. The spectator, here, is meant to be offered an integral engagement within all the radical aspects of the new, and as such is taken as someone who will get access, through contact with the artwork, to a possibility of real emancipation and autonomy.

We have been arguing here for the presence of the “participatory” as a general and epistemological condition for the past fifty years of contemporary art. This condition has been variously appropriated by different works’ and events’ layers and roles, and by the actors and forces that compose the art circuit: it is not difficult to see, then, how the corporate art world, for instance, has been profiting from this, publicizing big, spectacular art events as special participatory moments, or how society has been slowly inserting into all of us the timing of consumption as a gesture of will and desire, as described in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s vehement and acute analysis of the fundamentals of capitalism, *Capitalism et Schizophrenia* (vol. 1, 1972; vol. 2, 1980). Pointing to the demand for the other as part of an avant-garde platform intends to shed some light on this process as a truly constitutive element of the contemporary artifact—obviously, the term “formal” does not fit here, because it is no longer a matter of plastic composition but rather a problem of concept and sensitization. How to conceive something (an object, an event, a film, an image, etc.) that can function as an artwork in terms of triggering the production of new sensorial layers? And, moreover, which takes these particular dynamics as a bodily assemblage (artwork + participator) where the subject is rebuilt and the symbolic rewritten, as a simultaneous and bidirectional process? The questions seem awkward; to produce sense, the artwork should (not exclusively, of course, this is just one possible account of the problem) be addressed by the *informe*, by the idea of gaming (not game theory, but an area related to the history of games in culture and politics), and by the political frame of a bio- or micropolitics. Respectively, such a blurring of formal and previously established categories, as well as the maintenance of a space for open conversation and the public problematization of subjects and bodies, would make the problem of producing art in a participatory mode productive in terms of establishing lines of resistance against instrumentalization and other forms of manipulative appropriation. Artists like Oiticica and Clark, but also David Medalla, Antônio Dias, Luis Camnitzer, and Cildo Meireles, for instance, helped (in different modes and by different strategies) to build the thickness of this contact zone, allocating responsibility to the viewer and establishing the double aggregate “body subject + work of art” as an unavoidable feature of the contemporary.

Such avant-garde pedagogical capital, in terms of participatory practices, proved decisive in the context of the 1980s and ’90s, when Brazilian society shifted from military dictatorial control to a neoliberal market economy following the spread of integrated world capitalism. I started to work as an artist under these conditions, and developed my practice as a combination of artistic and communication strategies—in the sense of organizing visual and

conceptual aspects so that they were able to perceptually flow easily through certain networks: signs, logos, diagrams, refrains, and other forms of graphic communication that presuppose direct contact with the viewer. There was a moment when a decision had to be made: in 1990, I reduced all my work to a simple drawing, which was conceived of as an easily memorizable particle, and I developed this as a vehicle or a sort of virus, for circulating in *your* body (therefore, pointing directly toward the reader or viewer)—the adopted *artistic methodology* suggested the use of contagion theory, together with the repetition of visual refrains.⁶ After some initial experiences as artist in the atmosphere of the so-called re-democratization period,⁷ it was possible—as for several other artists from the period (such as Alexandre Dacosta, Alex Hamburger, Márcia X., and Mario Ramiro)—to comprehend that the art circuit and the neoliberal economy were developing new and complex relationship patterns, and were doing so quickly and aggressively: the 1980s artists who emerged globally under the “return to painting” melded perfectly into these new dynamics and were quickly promoted as representatives of the period. Such an overload of strategic and promotional practices encountered resistance among artists with art- and science-research-based practices (Eduardo Kac, Ramiro) and performative practices (Dacosta, Hamburger, Márcia X.)—as well as within the field of the “participatory.” As already indicated, the corporative economy organized its management programs in order to engage the subject in a productive and creative mode.⁸ It is not a coincidence that the work of Oiticica and Clark resurfaced in such a context, after decades of an almost underground (or “subterranean,” as Oiticica preferred) and lateral existence: when the game of art was running the risk of losing itself in a sort of speculative bubble, where the institutional fabric could not clearly assign value to artwork apart from that based in art-market operations, the presence of two artists who deliberately set their work and themselves apart from these dynamics (Clark’s and Oiticica’s practices started in the late 1950s, still under the impact of modernism) somehow restored some concrete value to critical art practice. This (urgent and necessary, of course) emergence—which can be exemplified by the first international Oiticica retrospective, organized at the Witte de With in 1992 by Luciano Figueiredo, Guy Brett, Chris Dercon, and Catherine David⁹—figures as a symptom of the heatedness of the dispute between the cooperative and institutional art universes—necessary for adjoining critical and intellectual value with contemporary practice—as well as indicating the strength of the interests and actors (institutions and artists, but also banks and other international finance and communication companies) that continue to align themselves with the topic of “participation strategies.” Clearly, it was important to stress that an artistic, critical, and intellectual compromise should prove viable and suitable for strategies of resistance (still to be further explored, of course) before the subject would become generally dispersed through the interests of the new cultural economy. The rapidity of the alignment between art and neoliberal practices also indicates how ambiguous the connections have been between both the Concrete and Neoconcrete artists’ heirs¹⁰ and the current art market—because it is in fact almost impossible to make work for both the market and within the pedagogical field without clearly comprehending the complex implications of both fields (basically, how difficult it is for the market and the pedagogical to get along without strong conflicts). When I initiated the project *NBP (Novas Bases para a Personalidade)* (New Basis for Personality, 1990–ongoing), it was as a gesture of locating the work in line with transformational strategies,¹¹ in close contact with the other and acting to involve and

model the subject: “*NBP* is a program for sudden changes. What? How? When? Let it be contagious: they will be the fruit of your own desire and effort.”¹² There was a recognition, through this particular project, of the existence of a locus of potentiality proper to the contemporary artwork and, equally, of the need to occupy it conceptually and sensorially¹³—seeking to make the artwork productive and to adopt procedures that would foreground the avant-garde’s pedagogical capital as a means of resisting the speculative capitalism of the private art market (the only active side of the commercial Brazilian art sphere: there has not yet been a public initiative to support collecting outside the private sphere).

The sign that I adopted as a starting point and that I repeated in different ways in subsequent years has connections to Daniel Buren’s reductionist strategy, in the sense of establishing an iconic structure for continuous play: “the repetition which interests us is that of a method and not a mannerism (or trick): it is a repetition with differences.”¹⁴ But an important and significant methodological particularity for *NBP* indicates another strategic position: the *NBP* sign does not depart directly from painting (as Buren’s does), and instead assumes a viral and communicational profile, which not only makes it function as a vehicle or mediator but also situates it as an emblem that points simultaneously to the visual and to the discursive.¹⁵ This double bind triggers every and each unfolding of the *NBP*, which includes, from 1991 to 2000, a series of sculptural objects that deal with the size of the human body, and, since 2001, a series of architectonic sculptural structures; this development is accompanied by diagrams and texts and also some closed-circuit live video installations. The project does not, of course, see discourse simply as an explanatory tool or the visual as a purely seductive and hypnotic gadget, but carefully attempts to bring both fields together as mutually implicated layers, in permanent contact with each other. If this condition makes the project’s reception flow (the direct-contact contagion from mind to mind, body to body) slower than in similar endeavors that organized participatory or relational strategies more pragmatically and that were more market-oriented—for, in *NBP*, the viewer/reader has more or less to follow both the visual and verbal fields—it also produces an interesting action field where gestures can replicate themselves sensorially and conceptually; it is possible to “see” how visual structures attach themselves to concepts in complex ways, to experiment with producing a “problem space without a solution,” where questions are brought forward as devices for opening spaces and making connections. There the subject is confronted with the production of speech as the consequence of intensive and sensorial involvement in visual/conceptual structures.

Projects like *Would you like to participate in an artistic experience?* (1994–ongoing) and *me–you: choreographies, games and exercises* (1997–ongoing) are conceived as methods for engaging the other through the artwork, but in such a way that the subject can take part in the proposed situations and produce something in these situations—be it speech, images, written statements, choreographic movements, events, experiences, etc. That is, the subject is given space for organizing him- or herself in terms of both visual and verbal involvement. Group dynamics are important to how these situations unfold, particularly, in the “me–you” actions—an ongoing series of choreographies, games, and exercises that I have been performing with different sets of participants, and that are carried out mostly in



Ricardo Basbaum, *Would you like to participate in an artistic experience?*, 1994 – ongoing, painted steel object, experience, 125 x 80 x 18 cm, participation Karin Schneider, New York, 2010. Photo: Courtesy the participant.

outdoor public spaces, without any specific audience—where the events succeed when the initial unrelated participants start to behave as one organic and affective entity, a sort of fragile and local swarm, forceful and volatile at the same time.¹⁶ This aspect brings to the work some sort of self-sufficiency that does not require the presence of the habitual art audience (as do Allan Kaprow's "activities"¹⁷); the games develop within the group, and the

results are publicly visible only when the video is exhibited. The reader/viewer and the art proposal suffice to trigger a situation and make the poetics of the work function: here, the aggregate “artwork + (collective) subject” is the basic unity that is submitted to transformational dynamics (we could add “the artist” to this cluster, as I am also included in the experiences, and, in certain cases, “the institutional partner”). The participatory condition is not proposed as mere entertainment (although fun, of course, can be part of the process) or empty production in and for itself, but as the moment when the subject and artwork are taken to a liminal state, each one pushed toward the other in the direction of a mixing situation where body and artwork superimpose and create common regions, membranes, and folds. Not only is the art piece meant to be actively enacted, but the subject is also meant to be produced in a different way, in close contact with the work, and to reinvent him or herself there. Such a condition is not easily achieved under the art system’s standard functioning: where in this process can the art institutions, the collectors, and the art market access the work and make it available to the so-called general public?



conversations & exercises [installation area + collective-conversation], 2012, iron, fabric, foam, 600 x 900 x 240 cm, collective conversation, public reading with Kyu Hyun, Hye Jin, Dong Ju, Hyo Jeong, Song-yi, Na Young Kim, Da Young, Na Young, Jeong, Min-Jeong, Ji-Hee, Sun Hee, Ricardo Basbaum. Courtesy Busan Biennale 2012. Photo: Hyun Min Lee.

Under the participatory “wave” that shakes the economy, artists have anticipated—since the 1950s—certain effects and have been addressing the multitude in various ways: sensorial-conceptual developments by artists become useful and strategic now. The condition of this operation can be turned into the pedagogical if the investment involves the production of the subject and the artwork at the same time, as part of the very process of the aesthetic experience (which should itself be inseparable from an awareness of its

institutional location). Seen from the perspective of the modification of the economy of culture, in the last decade of the twentieth century, the pedagogical—as proposed by the avant-garde, in terms of the public sharing of the sensorial and conceptual aspects of artistic propositions and the production of a new subject from that confrontation—is recognized as one of the regions that can be occupied by strategies of resistance that value *contact* as a means of bringing forward *difference*, in terms of subjectification and transformational dynamics (i.e., resistance). Today, this aspect has also been highly disputed by the actors of macroeconomic games—and this is an overly present symptom of how significant it is now: it is important not only to pay attention to the microsensorial¹⁸ (the layers of perception that are activated when in contact with the artistic proposition) but also to occupy such space with double-bound sensorial and discursive strategies. The pedagogy of the avant-garde indicates how to produce membranes that generate contact and potentialize experience: *becoming other with the artwork* points toward a model for action, for modeling the subject and being transformed by it, outside formal limits. As an artist, I have focused on this scenario for the transformation of art and its actors—coming up with proposals to contribute to this general shift in terms of the production of the sensorial and the discursive together. New images for artists are being continuously arranged and collectively modified, emphasizing more than ever the act of listening, of being attentive to any shake, touch, scratch, and sign produced in close or distant contact. Thus, working as an artist in the years to come (that is, looking ahead from the conditions of today) seems to pose some particular and specific questions: the contemporary art field is daily becoming more integrated into the pragmatics of the regular cultural economy, making the art circuit change some of its practices to find places closer to the culture industry. If an increase in the number of regular practicing artists can be expected, perhaps also a better and more generous distribution of art's conceptual and pedagogical capital is in process—breaking some still-present class, economic, and cultural barriers and also pointing to inevitable changes in its concepts, modes of production, and reception. But no one has the right to speculate from within the art field; this is not a place from which to look at the future—the contemporary artist lives and produces problems as part of a radical present that is not easily accessible, and to work for its emergence is one of the main tasks of the contemporary. However, how do you participate in something—an action or process—when your body is already *there*, long before you answer yes or no? The more interesting art practices today may bring us closer to this paradox: to mobilize the other as an extension of yourself and mobilize yourself as an extension of the other—where alterity is mutually reinforced, and where *me* and *you* are continuously replaced by a larger and external contact area. What can *we* do but live outside ourselves?

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Notes

- 1 This is how Allan Kaprow refers to Marcel Duchamp in one of his texts. See Allan Kaprow, "Doctor MD," in *Allan Kaprow: Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 127–129.
- 2 For N. Katherine Hayles, the Macy Conferences on Cybernetics were "radically interdisciplinary," putting together "researchers from a wide variety of fields—neurophysiology, electrical engineering, philosophy, semantics, literature, and psychology, among others." Some of its main topics involved "how to convince that humans and machines were brothers under the skin" and to act "as crossroads for the traffic in cybernetic models and artifacts." Hayles organized the conferences' arguments along "three fronts": "the construction of information as a theoretical entity," "the construction of [human] neural structures [...] as flows of information," and "the construction of artifacts that translated information flows into observable operations." See N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- 3 The organic line is a line that has not been drafted or carved by anyone, but which results from the contact of two different surfaces (planes, things, objects, bodies, or even concepts). According to Guy Brett, Lygia Clark liked to exemplify the organic line as the one we can see "between the window and the window frame or between tiles on the floor." She stated that it first appeared in 1954, when she was observing the line that formed where a framed collage touched the passe-partout paper. She wrote: "I set aside this research for two years because I did not know how to deal with this space set free." Quoted in Guy Brett, "Lygia Clark: The Borderline Between Art and Life," in *Third Text*, no. 1 (Autumn 1987): p. 67. See also Ricardo Basbaum, "Within the Organic Line and After," in *Art after Conceptual Art*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann (Vienna: Generali Foundation; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), pp. 87–99.
- 4 However, Klein was more concerned with the "immaterial" mediation layers than with the direct touch of the artwork in the body. The work's full title is *La spécialisation de la sensibilité à l'état matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée, Le Vide* (The Specialization of Sensibility in the Raw Material State into Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility, The Void).
- 5 Suely Rolnik states this point precisely: "The notion of 'anthropophagy' [...] proposed by the [Brazilian] modernists harks back to a practice of the indigenous Tupinambás [...], a complex ritual, which could go on for months, years even, in which enemies made captive in battles would be killed and devoured; cannibalism is only one of its stages." Another stage involved the executor changing his name and scarring his body with the name of the enemy: "The existence of the other [...] was thus inscribed in the memory of the body, producing unpredictable becomings of subjectivity." Thus, in "advancing the idea of anthropophagy, the avant-garde of Brazilian modernism extrapolates from the literality of the indigenous ceremony, in order to extract from it the ethical formula of an unavoidable existence of an otherness in oneself that presides over the ritual and to make it migrate into the terrain of culture. With this gesture, the active presence of this formula in a mode of cultural creation practiced in Brazil since its foundation is given visibility and affirmed as a value: the critical and irreverent devouring of an otherness always multiple and variable." Rolnik also proposes an important update: "We would define the anthropophagic cultural micro-politic as a continuous process of singularisation, resulting from the composition of particles of numberless devoured others and the diagram of their respective marks in the body's memory. A poetic response—with sarcastic humour—to the need to confront the imposing presence of the colonising cultures [...]; an answer [...] to [the] need to come to grips with and render positive the process of hybridisation brought by successive waves of immigration, which has always configured the country's lived experience." See Suely Rolnik, "Politics of the Fluid, Hybrid and Flexible: Avoiding False Problems," in *SUM (Magazine for Contemporary Art)*, no. 2 (Summer 2008).
- 6 See Ricardo Basbaum, "What Is *NBP*?" (manifesto, 1990), <http://www.nbp.pro.br/nbp.php> (accessed December 12, 2010).
- 7 The first presidential elections after the end of the dictatorship were held in Brazil in 1989.
- 8 See Brian Holmes, "The Flexible Personality: For a New Cultural Critique" (2002), <http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/1106/holmes/en>; and Suely Rolnik, "The Geopolitics of Pimping" (2006), <http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/1106/rolnik/en> (both accessed October 18, 2010).
- 9 The art critic Glória Ferreira organized the first survey of the work of Clark and Oiticica in 1986, at Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro. The exhibition *Lygia Clark e Hélio Oiticica* had "a very particular field of approach, [...] the 'participation of the spectator' [...] as the unfolding of the questions common to them during the Neoconcrete period." See G. Ferreira, "Terreiro do Paço: cena para Lygia Clark e Hélio Oiticica," in *Lygia Clark e Hélio Oiticica, Sala Especial do 9º Salão Nacional de Artes Plásticas* (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte/INAP, 1986). Clark was still alive and attended the exhibition several times. The arguments she had with collectors regarding the originals of her *Bichos*, a series of manipulable 1960s sculptures included in the exhibition, were remarkable: though she invited the public to use them, the collectors who owned the pieces prevented any manipulation.
- 10 It is not a coincidence that the estates of the three main Neoconcrete artists (Clark, Oiticica, and Pape) are managed by their families as private institutions. This gesture is justified by the lack of support by Brazilian museums and governmental institutions for contemporary art in general (with very few exceptions). The private institutions have to search for funds on the corporate and art markets, sometimes assuming positions that directly contradict certain gestures the artists themselves defended in their lifetimes. It is not necessary to say that such conflicts and contradictions speak vehemently about the current economy of

culture. See Projeto Hélio Oiticica, founded in 1981, <http://www.heliooiticica.org.br>; Associação Cultural O Mundo de Lygia Clark, founded in 2001, <http://www.lygiaclark.org.br>; and Associação Cultural Projeto Lygia Pape, founded in 2004, <http://www.lygiapape.org.br> (all accessed July 11, 2011).

- 11 For “transformational strategies” I refer to the different programs and projects that aim to actively engage the other (viewer or participant) in an intensive process vis-à-vis the artwork, facing a “problematic field” and triggering a subjectification process. See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 246.
- 12 Basbaum, “What Is *NBP*?”
- 13 This aspect of contemporary artworks is developed in my text “Who Sees Our Work?,” in *Roland*, no. 1 (May 2009): pp. 41–48. Also available at <http://ica.org.uk/download.php?id=696> (accessed December 12, 2010).
- 14 Daniel Buren, “Beware,” in *5 Texts* (London: John Weber Gallery; New York: Jack Wendler Gallery, 1973), p. 17.
- 15 If I refer to a *viral strategy* for the *NBP* project, it has to do with the particular relation it establishes to the issues of *replication*, *contact*, and *contagion*: the work (relational situations, objects, and installations) seeks a continuous restaging of the initial specific-shape drawing, always with differences, investing in a sort of tactile/haptic condition in which the body is always physically involved. The proposed effects can be organized around Jacques Derrida’s “virology”: the French philosopher “begins a philosophical enterprise that attempts to *introduce the Other into the I*: a redefinition of the subject. Eventually, this ‘introduction’ becomes ‘infection’, and the Other is radically recast as the virus.” Thierry Bardini, “Hypervirus: A Clinical Report,” *CTheory* 29, nos. 1–2, <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=504> (accessed April 8, 2011).
- 16 For an account of the “me–you” actions, see my text “Differences between us and them” (2003), <http://rbtxt.files.wordpress.com> (accessed July 11, 2011). Originally published in *Us and Them—Static Pamphlet Anthology 2003–04*, ed. Becky Shaw and Gareth Woollam (Liverpool: Static Gallery, 2005).
- 17 The development of the work of Allan Kaprow (1927–2006) is usually considered under three sequential and complementary series: “environments,” “Happenings,” and “activities.” The latter series, made after the 1970s, consisted in sets of daily actions and gestures, to be performed by small groups of volunteers under the artist’s written instructions or scores. The activities were never documented for public notice as they were actions that should be performed—and later discussed—only within the group of participants. Toward the end of his life, Kaprow encouraged others to create new versions of his works “under three principles formulated by the artist: site-specificity, impermanence, and doubt in art.” See the gallery guide published to accompany *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life*, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, March 23–June 30, 2008, http://www.moca.org/kaprow/GalleryGuide_Kaprow.pdf (accessed August 1, 2011).
- 18 See José Gil, *A imagem nua e as pequenas percepções: estética e metafenomenologia* (Lisbon: Relógio D’Água, 1996).

“ I have put into my cardboard box the papers that contain my production. But whenever they fell into it, I treated them as if they had turned at the same moment into debt papers ... I felt I would never put enough into it, and the imagined defecit added up to the feeling that I had not done enough to redeem the debt.”

What Is Counterproductiveness? What Is Ossipism? And a Few More Counterproductive Questions.

Josef Strau

I.

Counterproduction is not an answer, it has no definition, or does it and I don't know about it? Counterproduction is a label given to some works and withdrawn from others in what's often a quite subjective way, as if by empathy instead of common, objective rules of evaluation. At least this is how the term had always appeared to me. But contorted evaluation is not unusual whenever it comes to applying notions of subculture or subversion. As I prepared this contribution, and after a few conversations and Q&A's regarding the definition of counterproduction, I lost or forgot all about the connections between counterproduction and subversive activities, as if connecting the two were a huge misunderstanding, produced only by myself. I should rather have asked a theoretician of counterculture for an interview. In general, I would have enjoyed having my activities, or some other results of production, explained one after the other, and I would have asked about each one, but always and first of all and primarily asked whether it was counterproductive or not (or subversive or not). In my desire for the verdict of authority, I wondered whether I should not ask the curators of the exhibition and of the catalogue to do the job for me, but the habits and rules of authorship demanded that both the Q's and the A's be given by just the one person who is writing, who is only me. To be honest, during the conversations I tended to lose my last bit of confidence in counterproduction: both the notion and the tool that it promises. How can a common word for an idea regarding culture, starting with "counter-" like "counterculture," become a word describing a mechanism of contemporary economics or become the word for the contemporary mechanisms of production transferred from mainstream economics to culture? Not that I would refuse the explanation of cultural mechanisms by economic mechanisms, as I would never refuse any mode of explanation by means of external logic, but as economics has become such an intense, dominant ideological meta-structure for everything else recently, I learned from my investigation of the confusing term "counterproduction" that the purely economic interpretation became even in its critical use oppressive for almost any intellectual operation. One part of my writer's identity would say, "Leave us alone with it," but my question to the counterproduction authority is whether the rage against *all* economic ideology as formulated here is not just culture pessimism, as well as sad and boring, because it transforms the counterproduction issue purely into an artist's issue, no?

II.

Counterproduction intends to establish the idea that an artist's production is not just to be perceived as the production of his primary object, maybe, maybe, but also includes the production of the object's context. He or she generates a social network, just to mention the most cited instance, but the production includes as well the accumulation of information and its use in order to predetermine the object's or the commodity's interpretation. All these operations together are used to increase the value of the one object, which was formerly called the primary object of production. For a long time, I believed that the focus on the secondary means of production, in earlier times called second-order means of production, is a case of an activity of social and cultural progression. For its own sake alone, but also for the fun that a shift of preference toward the second-order activity would provide, disturbing and confusing the authority of the artist and his or her apologetic and reactionary followers. When I participated in an art space in Cologne a long time ago, the concentration on these second-order activities, and the application of this theory, were key and generated many inventive procedures. But could this procedure still be perceived as "counter-" or "sub-" (subversive, subcultural), in the context of today's particularly European obsession with economic paradigms, particularly as these paradigms oppressively take over many cultural movements and assumptions in both their affirmative and their critical modes? "No, honestly, by no means. (No)"?

III.

As much as production is not necessarily the last question in an artistic or cultural field of activity, subversion should remain the primary act in the hierarchy of cultural action. In the fictitious game of asking about and judging the amount of counterproductiveness in different works and searching for questions for the authorities of counterproduction, I quickly found a whole list of examples that I wished to have legitimized as counterproductive. Of course, the arbitrary list contains an order, a subconscious structure, which is the narcissistic order of biographical references.

My first question mentioned above, the question about the counterproductive quality of the second-order form laid out in the art space in early-1990s Cologne, appears to be the beginning of practical counterproductive considerations in my own biography. I was hoping to go through my own life's short list of activities vis-à-vis the fictitious voice of counterproductiveness before arriving in the present day's mode of writing as represented within the inside of the L and J tunnel sculptures. Most of all, I wanted to get the answer to the crazy-sounding question of whether my more recent exploration of theological fields and stories could be praised as counterproductive for its almost grotesque presumption or should be condemned as the theoretical failure of an escapist concept. An exciting question, in fact. No?

IV.

While we, the curators and I, the artist, were planning my participation in the exhibition, this question became serious torture for me. First, I felt bad to the extent of self-torture because it seemed it was hidden from or not revealed enough to the curators, particularly as they were the curators of a place well known unto even faraway places as the most sublime temple for the purest post-Conceptual art, a decades-long holder of both artists and ideas, as well as filter for their cleanest selection. But then it turned into a very different experience, and there was no problem except my irrational fear of having failed to recognize the idea of counterproduction enough, but it was quite the opposite: here of all places I was supposed to show an almost primitivist, expressionist art tunnel containing the transformation of biblical narratives, all my texts written in simple modes of expression. I felt some insecurity. What if they knew exactly what these works, the texts inside the tunnels from some years before, represented in all their details? I felt the insecurity of this unasked question, and the silence I created became a space for developing a not unusual fear of representation, of being exposed in a scary way. Even the fear involved I needed to interpret as a mode of counterproductiveness, the fear of becoming minor, the fear of appearing stupid, etc., but can this fear not sometimes turn into a tool for making something counterproductive, even subversive, or no?

O n c e
 my therapist sugge-
 sted that it was not so good
 for me to completely neglect any
 religious ideas and narratives, since
 i seemed to be quite influenced by them
 from childhood. i could, she suggested, just
 rediscover them, without necessarily belie-
 ving in them. she herself was a non-believer. i
 vaguely remembered that I had in fact loved some
 of the stories as a child, partilycularly the almost biographical
 story of the man who was patron to my name. so
 i took the book from my shelf and read it again:

a multi- coloured coat was made for him. when his brothers saw it they started hating him and could not exchange a single word of friendliness with him. he was having dreams and once he told his dreams to them and they just hated him even more. nonetheless when he had another dream, he came to them yet again and said "Listen, what a dream i had...". they became very jealous and said to him: "do you want to become king over us, do you want to rule over us?" once when he followed his brothers again to sichem, they saw him coming towards them from afar and decided to make an attempt on his life. one said to the others, "look, our master of dreams is approaching. we should just kill him now by throwing him into one of the cisterns, and just say that a wild animal has eaten him. then we shall see what dreams he has". now look: as he greets his brothers they grasp his coat from behind – as it was his very particular multi- coloured coat. they seized him and threw him into the empty pit.

V.

These works, the texts inside the tunnel, were about the figure of a dreamer, the unproductive refuser of work named Josef, in his early years narcissistically mostly concerned with his special and many-colored jacket and with the endless telling of dreams, which attracted the aggressive dislike of everyone else. Josef, one of the earliest representers of the nonproductive artist, of the artist who is described as an artist but has no work of art. Instead of producing his objects of production, he produces possibly only himself, or at least the image of himself; the image he dreams of is the image of himself; he is someone who produces speech and produces and interprets dreams but refuses anything else. He is walking, he is talking, he puts his words into circulation. All of this is described to the “normal” people around him as his difference and as his narcissism, and he even appears to be a vain person who is doing everything differently from the members of his environment—that is, his huge family—most obviously dressing differently. He is not only not making any works, he is trying not to work at all. He is walking around, he is saying things. He is a dreamer. Josef is described as if being an artist were predetermined for him, as is probably the case with many artists: he was an artist even before he began producing art. Most of all, he is an artist alone for he quickly fails. In the worst way, his difference leads to his social exclusion and even causes the cruel attempt to murder him. But after this failed attempt, he makes productive these most painful experience of exclusion, turns it into productive impacts. But that has to happen later in his lifetime.

While the generation before the counterproducers was in its subversiveness more antiproducing, deconstructing, the process was following a thought, a concept; the action was a rage reaction against convention, in order to get to a critical point of view, apart from mainstream society. Whereas one could say that the following generation didn't build the attitude of deconstruction by themselves, they didn't have to learn it first, but they grew up with it, it was a part of their environment, and now it's a condition. They accept the parameters of today's economic value system, because the system's critique and negation are already contained within the system itself. Maybe this is what distinguishes counterproduction from the counterculture of the 1970s: that it admits this distorted connotation of the term “counter-” and the impossibility of an independent, autonomous (alternative) production is the product's condition; in fact, the denial or prohibition of the work is what it makes it a real counterproduct. Looking at the generational difference, again in the example of Josef, one can see that his grandfather Abraham's iconoclastic action to destroy the sculptures of his society's gods was rebellious, while Josef's focus on dreams might be referred to as counterproductive “by nature.”

While the art space's second-order tactics were emanating from understood political tactics and analysis, from theories of so-called counterauthorship maneuvers, from the idea of art as political field of public conflict, another counterproductive mode appeared as a purely “artistic” one, or possibly a psychoanalytic onederiving from questions of self-creation or merely of a narcissistic self-construction. Later on, this second mode was probably categorized and taken over by the term “dandyism.” This made for two different and mostly competing tendencies within or motivations for counterproduction and the antiproducer,

nonproductive, or even work-refusing attitude; one was theoretical and politically determined, and the other derived from the artist, from the construction of the artist's role and from the meaning of the artist's image. Looking back to this old classic art hassle of Cologne, not just the Cologne art scene, metaphorically Josef represents the second in an almost theological way, but not only. Could it be asked whether the biblical Josef story is acceptable as a model of and evidence for counterproductiveness?

VI.

Perfume story or how to buy Hermès in Vienna. Apropos, Vienna has changed and Austria has taken it all over, Austria alone, Vienna's worst enemy as I used to believe then, before having no choice except leaving Vienna and experiencing the big world and eternal nomadism. The way we were treated in the perfumery next to the opera house was like being in some quite small town, very alpine, and we felt a touch of alienation and of exclusion for being different, so I told the story of my attempt to find a perfume as a nonexplicit ingredient for an artwork, and said that I wanted people to smell the perfume while crawling in the tunnel and later would associate the memory of the sculpture with smells of perfume. As I explained and explained to the one seller, I saw in the shop mirror that the other sellers were giving signs to our seller, signs that she should find out what kind of people we were. Later I saw in the other mirror that our seller was holding up a piece of paper saying in big capital letters the words "ARTIST, SCULPTOR." Kind of ashamed, I turned round at the wrong moment, and the seller saw that I saw the paper and saw her secret communication with the other sellers, so she came over to Nora and apologized for it. As in many other similar cases I experienced during my installation visit to the Generali Foundation and during my general visit to Vienna, I had removed my readiness for resentment and anger about Vienna and the Viennese, and consequently we departed from the perfume store as if we'd been blessed by an abundance of reconciliation energy, and we were even like new friends of the perfumery at the opera house, wearing the Hermès fragrance named Voyage, chosen mostly for the name, as it refers to the scene I most remember whenever imagining Josef's life, the scene where he has to leave his neighborhood secretly after the failed murder attempt by his brothers. He leaves packed and hidden in boxes and fabrics, surrounded by the smells of perfumes; he was, according to the story, sold as a slave to Oriental perfume dealers who bought him in order to sell him in Mizraim (Egypt). It was already the most important scene for my identification with Josef in my earlier life, although I could not predict my life, and was the reason I slowly started accepting my name then, contrary to my earliest years when I refused it angrily and asked to be called David. Now since my therapy I am reconciled with the name and believe it was chosen by inner voices too. This leads me to my next question to the authorities: can the application of the perfume on the sculpture be a mode of counterproduction, meaning is it a mode of counterproduction to apply an additional ingredient, very nonexplicitly, even if it is just a perfume and is the imaginary inversion of the bourgeois application of perfume?

L.**Or the debt box****Text from the takeaway poster given away in the L sculpture**

In the upper part of the homely wooden walk-in wardrobe there is an old cardboard box, and it is possibly the most faraway object in the whole room, if measured from the main workplace position, either the desk or the comfy orange checked sofa. One has to use the ladder or at least a chair to get hold of the box. This particular cardboard box has a kind of mailbox function: whenever the postman delivers any letter, including the printed, published evidence of the latest new text I had written or any kind of printed reference or invitation cards, I would ritually take the publication out of its envelope and would jump up there to let it disappear in this special cardboard box, an action that would make me feel that what I had done and produced disappeared, but only halfway, as it still would remain somehow within my space, as far away as possible, but it was guaranteed that it would not leave a big mark within my memory. Eventually the box would be opened, but only whenever serious evidence about my life or my business was required, as for instance whenever evidence of my work for immigration papers had to be presented. The inside space of the box would suddenly be exposed to the light again, and its papers would have their sleep mode interrupted, and I would have to face the loose disconnectedness of its real content, the almost disturbing arbitrariness of all the past text-production efforts. My infantile fascination with the cardboard box's specific nonexistence magic is quite similar to a general modern obsession with all mechanisms within our private interior bourgeois space that guarantee the disappearance of personal objects. Instead of cultivating the evidence of achievement, like framing at least some of it in vitrines or similar furniture, or by purchasing portfolio folders to protect it in some logical order, I threw it into the box, to which I only can ascribe abysmal qualities. Of course I know that most of my acquaintances don't cultivate the collection of their "literary" results at all either, but still I wonder what determines the degree of these so-called regressive infantile rituals of rejection, of not wanting to see or know anything at all of what has been done successfully, as if they were stinking, useless objects of misbehavior. Is it a feeling of shame or even of guilt?

But one day this cardboard-box moment had an unexpectedly different effect. Suddenly I perceived that the reappearance of the collected items inside the box, rather than disgust and repulsion, was establishing an almost proud self-consciousness, as if it had become evidence of some achievement; as if, without knowing, I had found a practical, useful skill, or now knew how to use at least one simple tool in my life, as much as writing could be called a tool, formed both by desire and by torturous discipline. And consequently I had to rethink: the publication of all these loose text results demands a new and responsible attitude, a taking-care-what-to-do-about-it attitude, an attitude about how and for what greater aims the tool should be used in the future, and that it should be used for more useful matters, useful for the society particularly.

I have put into my cardboard box the papers that contain my production. But whenever they fell into it, I treated them as if they had turned at the same moment into debt papers.

The box made me feel uncomfortable infinitely. I felt I would never put enough into it, and the imagined deficit added up to the feeling that I had not done enough to redeem the debt, and that this debt was without a doubt the result of a feeling toward my family and toward my educators. Under the shadow of the heritage of debt, my very evidence of production turned into evidence of debt. I often forgot that the deal was imaginary, but felt that the transformation of me the producer into me the slave of debt might be real, even if the result of an imaginary expropriation. The feeling was real.

The magic cardboard box of my text collection turned into a debt box. It is like a so-called bad bank. It swallows "toxic" papers. But since we talk in contemporary fashionable economics metaphors, helping the social aim of turning everything into a question of the economic, even the modes of our life within our souls, I should affirmatively say that the box makes the imaginary debt real, even if it is never real anyway. Or is the debt real in one system but imaginary in another, and what then about moving the papers from the one box to another one where they would not carry any toxic guilt ingredients? I know this all sounds just too funny, too perfect, in the sense of recent debt discussions; anyway, using the parent-child relation in any contemporary artwork is a difficult issue, first of all as it is always difficult when an artist risks giving his own work some subjective edge, as any kind of authentic material will risk ironic reactions.

But I am already using my own text as an opportunity to extend the assignment to describe and interpret the work of Henrik Olesen, the work concerning the father-mother-child triangle, toward my own grave conclusions about general artistic values and qualities, and so I extend it as well by incorporating fashionable economic discourse on debt politics and resistance. I should rather try to make Henrik's assumptions my own, becoming the symbolic administrative expropriator of his practice, instead of dreaming of falsely positive projects such as the writing of natural biographies. In general, I wished to say the opposite, urgently asserting that practice like his is a nearly political mode of resistance by means of art, emphasizing the empirical and experiential, never solely the administration of opinions and conclusions.

OSSIPISM

Explanation to the text from the L sculpture

This and a few more sentences I had written down quite coincidentally while in fact trying to write primarily about a certain object, and this object was an art piece by Henrik Olesen, an object dedicated to the powers of the familial inheritance and the strange influences of the father and the mother. But when I repeated and edited certain parts of this text here again, I did not focus on this very complex object by Henrik; instead I interrupted the text whenever it came to determine the object's qualities; I left out these parts about the object, emphasizing and keeping the secondary story. While I worked on his object this other story came up in an almost automatic way, inventing and creating a second object, which is the so-called debt box. Is this counterproductive to the primary intention of the writing, the intention of art criticism, I wondered. Anyway, later when I edited it for this new (half-)

reprint, I wondered as well as in many cases before, not only wondered where the second object, the debt box, came from suddenly but as well wondered who then actually is the writer of this invention and of this second object, the box, as it cannot exactly be me. Once I thought that this person, the second writer, must have a name, or actually should be given a name as well and quite quickly, and so suddenly, without much thinking, his name became OSSIP. A short time later, Nora quietly passed me a little piece of paper in the train, the paper displaying a slim and quickly drawn portrait somewhere between a person and an animal, but very characteristic of something, somehow, and I immediately knew that it was her automatic portrait of the writer OSSIP himself. There was no doubt left, this is the appearance of the person, the second writer, who invented the debt box, which I sold as my own writing for the Henrik Olesen museum catalogue, and therefore I dedicated to him the writings in the then-empty L-space of counterproduction.

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Ricardo Basbaum lives and works in Rio de Janeiro. As an artist and writer, he has investigated art as an intermediating device and platform for the articulation of sensorial experience, language, and sociability. Since the late 1980s, he has nurtured a vocabulary specific to his work, applying it in a unique way to each event or institutional relationship. Recent solo shows include *conjs., re-bancos*: exercícios&conversas*, Museu de Arte da Pampulha, Belo Horizonte (2011). His work has been exhibited at Documenta (2007) and the Shanghai Biennale (2008). This year, he has participated in the Busan Biennale and the Bienal de São Paulo.

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Josef Strau lives in New York and Berlin. He is an artist and writer. From 2002 to 2006, he organized *Galerie Meerrettich* in the Glass Pavilion at the Volksbühne Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin. Strau uses his writings as part of his sculptural and conceptual work but has also written for catalogues such as *Isa Genzken. Stockholm 2009* and art magazines such as *Texte zur Kunst* and *Parkett*. His most recent solo exhibitions include *Josef Strau + Side Show*, Greene Naftali, New York (2012), *The Balalaika Moment*, Dépendance, Brussels (2010), *A DISSIDENCE COINCIDENCE BUT WHCTLJS*, Malmö Konsthall (2008), and *Voices and Substitutes*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (2006–2007).

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