

"Spaces of critical exchange" by Fionn Meade, MOUSSE Issue #33, 2012.



Liam Gillick, *Prototype Design for a Conference Room (With Joke by Matthew Modine, Arranged by Markus Weisbeck)*, installation view, "David," Frankfurter Kunstverein, 1999

Courtesy: the artist

Spaces of Critical Exchange

by Fionn Meade

For years now Liam Gillick has extended his artistic activities to the construction of discussion spaces – raised platforms, circular seating, partitions and structures that offer the body a limited set of options. Structures that are not easy, in which you have to choose to enter or not, but which also open up subversive, skeptical possibilities – of being there without taking part, or of getting distracted. Fionn Meade met with the artist to understand more about these structures and the problematic relationship of the artist with this particular type of production, where he has only formal control.

Fionn Meade: I want to ask you about your design for "The Desperate Edge of Now" at e-flux's new exhibition space, a show that features the work of British documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis, curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist. For me, it recalibrated a number of projects you've been involved with here in New York and elsewhere, including your collaborative part in the design of Ludlow 38's exhibition space, as well as your contribution to "OURS: Branding Democracy" at the Vera List Center for Art and Politics, for example. These projects extract sculptural and typographic elements from your own work to frame highly charged political content on a scale that seems approachable and even accessible. How do you see this commitment to exhibition design extending, but also complicating your practice?

Liam Gillick: One thing all of those projects have in common is a kind of lack. They're described as discursive, or you said "collaborative," when, in fact, they all demonstrate three key things: lack, suspicion, and withdrawal or a sense of subjugation, or something close to that. From the artistic perspective, they demonstrate a kind of submissiveness by working alongside structures or people for whom the process of actually accepting a movement into that kind of space is difficult or problematic. So, the strange thing about all of the things you mention is that they are quite isolated moments for me, working on them.

Isolated from your ongoing concerns?

You feel that they ought to be collaborative, they feel and smell collaborative, and it feels like there exists a clear exchange of ideas. But, in fact, what happens is that some of the people involved are deeply suspicious of contemporary art as an idea. For them contemporary art is clearly marked by certain excesses—an excess of ego, or an excess of stupidity, or the market, or co-option. If you read Adam Curtis' interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, he talks about his frustration with art being about other art. For him this means nothing new can happen. But what really happens is that for the people you're supposedly collaborating with, even when it's an institution like the New School, there is a deep suspicion of art, and an out-of-focus idea of what contemporary art does. So, as an artist you are trying to demonstrate that it is indeed possible to create a space where there could be the conditions of critical exchange. And to a certain extent that is a kind of submissive role.

You've previously used the word "resignation," a resignation of form. But at the Vera List, in the lead up to the last presidential election, your contribution deployed a raised staged or platform housing circular benches for a series of charrette-like dialogs or seminars, an idea taken from architecture and design where you put people in a room and give them a problem to solve. But the sculptural scenario makes the very idea of dialog agonistic upon immediate viewing of the form.

Yes, but this relates to what we could call the sometimes lazy language of discursive spaces. At some level, I create structures that don't carry the traditional modernist or neo-avantgarde ideas of what's required. Traits that historically were assumed to be best—flexible, mutable, user-friendly—become scenarios that are not easily modified, creating frameworks of difficulty. To my surprise, in none of these cases did anyone say, "but what if we want to move anything?" or "can we change it?" because in the end they didn't require flexibility. For me this started with the Berlin Biennale in 2001, in the attic space at Kunst-Werke. It was the first time I did anything that was a space for discussion or something to happen, and I made it virtually impossible to change the space. I did this deliberately in a bloody-minded way to make a point against the emerging ambience of the start-up or the tech company, or what's become extremely common within corporate life: the break-out room. I wanted to do something that

had a physical structure tied directly and intimately to the structure of the existing space, to create not a secure, but rather a fundamental place within which something else could happen. The place itself wasn't flexible, the idea being that the discourse should be.

This imposing of a boundary condition seems consistent with all the projects. As with the walk up, walk down form at Ludlow, you took a narrow Lower East Side space and made it even more difficult to navigate, prompting and perhaps even imposing subjectivity.

Yes, but this kind of subjectivity can often be de-coded. It's not a mystery. This is going somewhere I haven't talked about ever because, actually, I find it difficult and it's hard to find language for it. But in each case, you create the possibility for a clearly determined set of choices to be made by the body and space. Therefore, you can turn your back, as it were, on the show or on whatever is taking place (the event, the discussion) in Ludlow, and sit on the first steps, looking out the window towards the street if you so desire, in the same way that people sit on church steps without any intention of going in or taking any part. It's the same with the circular seating at the New School: you have the option to sit facing inwards and thereby be in a small group facing each other, but you can also all face outwards and therefore, because it's a circle, you're quite alienated from the people, even if they're sitting close to you. You're definitely separated. This phenomenon allows for skeptical presence within the structure.

You can compare this to what Nikolaus Hirsch did for the architectural intervention of United Nations Plaza in Berlin. Being an advanced architect and writer, his initial assumption is that, like a lot of architects, he believes in the agency of the mass. If you give them elements that can be combined in different ways, they will spontaneously perform a productive social structure. So, he basically made cubes that can be combined in any way that you want.

Right, the idea of a re-combinatory freedom.

This imagines that people would spontaneously make a stadium if necessary, or individual seating if necessary. But, of course, what happens is that in most situations people's heightened skepticism about their very presence at a series of discursive events makes them reluctant to play out the role. And, in this sense, I agree with some of Claire Bishop's positions on participation and its problems. You can't make these assumptions about people, you can't expect them to all do the right thing. At the UN Plaza in Berlin, it required that someone, each time, had to take responsibility for showing people how it could be.

To demonstrate their freedom and participation.

Right. Now you could argue that this reveals that people actually don't want to spontaneously come together and make collectively built spaces in order to have a discussion. But this, in and of itself, isn't a profound

observation.

Yes, if you look at say Neoconcretismo transitioning into Tropicália, for example, the collective and performative act exists via the use of something that already has behavior tied it—as with say Oiticica's Parangoles—where there is a pre-existing socialized, almost ritualized reference coming from outside the exhibition space, outside of the architecturally enframed. You've often inverted or used architectural motifs and excerpts—an overhang or a waiting space—to create a formalized “hanging out” that seems to promote or imply a delinquent tendency.

Absolutely, but hanging out takes place in and around structures that are often not being used for that which they are intended. While not being too biographical about this, I am very conscious of witnessing that post-war donation of space to and for people. This gesture of giving you things like playgrounds, like the low planters you find in suburbia or surrounding a shopping mall. I'm influenced up to a point by this, by semi-fixed, ambiguous yet determined spaces you can step in or out of. There's a moment where you've crossed the barrier and you're in it or out of it. It's not the same as purely hanging out, because the whole place is not available. I try to create some form of barrier or notion that you're in it or out of it. It gives you the opportunity to decide whether or not you view yourself as taking part.

Of course, hanging out is slightly undervalued. What's the alternative? The bar is not hanging out. Bars and cafes are where revolutions start, but the types of revolutions that start in bars and cafes aren't necessarily by their nature communist or Marxist or even progressive. They can also be fascist. They can go in either direction. But hanging out retains potential. In being generous about things like Occupy Wall Street, it has a strong component of hanging out.

In my view, giving public address a collective face again seems one of the most important things to come out of the Occupy movement. People still need a corporeal, politicized collectivity. And perhaps this is a counter to the individualized managerialism that Adam Curtis points to, the perpetual training that characterizes much of contemporary professional life, the digital increase in self-managing your time and labor that puts you in a nonstop competition first and foremost with a projection of the self? This plays out to some degree in the art context via the prominence of symposia, where the tacit agreement can often seem to be that if you frame out and schedule time for critical discourse, you've already met the “discursive” expectation, a pre-apology as you've put it.

Yes, the announcement can become the most crucial thing and it's actually the least examined component for it carries with it pseudo-ethical assumptions that it must be inherently good, which we can't know. But the things we are talking about can seem played out when they're not, they're quite recent, and they're very vulnerable, and we cannot assume that they will always be accommodated. There's already a kind of

backlash within certain institutions against the idea of any kind of discursive component.

That seems definitely true. But one thing coming into view within the art context is the importance of an editorial position—an editorial gathering with multiple perspectives and subjective positions, but an emphasis away from one-off events and pre-apologies. Instead, a renewed editorial emphasis on proposition and serial voicing is recurrent and relates to what responsive programming might need to be today. Even with e-flux and the flood of announcements that bulwark their market position, they've put forward their position as invested propositions via e-flux journal and, now, the exhibition space.

Yes, exactly.

People write from an opinionated place on repeat occasions for their journal. The editorial does, however, create a boundary between those interested and those not. And, in this regard, perhaps an interest or lack thereof in the editorial underscores which venues are interested in the political.

Yes, it has a very specific position in that way. But what's happened with e-flux is really quite simple. And what's perverse about these things is that what appears to be an editorial position can only appear when it's backed up by a fraught, complicated series of disagreements. It can only come from an excess of positions. It has become a kind of gathering site for a number of people who are there on a daily basis, who are young and negotiating or fighting over positions rather than agreeing. However, saying that, there are also problems around it. I've proposed myself that Adam Curtis make a film about e-flux. Starting with: "This is the story of a man" [said like a film narrator]" who realized that he could sell information that already existed freely in the world." But these things are tricky, all of the platforms we're discussing. It's not like MoMA where it's laid out, ritualized and institutionalized. These other things, they're not there yet. We're not sure how people should behave.

You've discussed this as a gap between production and presentation, a need to get yourself into complications where there is not yet a consensus.

Absolutely, but what's interesting is you're somehow not seen as being responsible for them. That's one of the lacks I was talking about. You can bypass many of the questions of responsibility via the general flow of the way contemporary art is distributed and exchanged. You can evade them. On the other hand, I find that frustrating and irritating. What I find more urgent now is the problem that as this terrain gets more and more complicated and more and more examined, what would be another step? Or how would you then proceed? When Cyprien Gaillard is making pyramids of beer that you have to drink your way through...it's hard to know...

What a provocation even is.

Yeah, I'm not sure anything I've ever done has been any form of provocation. For me, this terrain that we're focusing on is the biggest question or problem for me. Yet what's frustrating is that it doesn't seem that it's the same for others. Of course, on one level it's extremely good because that means I can just dangle around and keep playing with it until I get bored or until it becomes irrelevant. But this leads to the question of the submissive or resigned character.

This relates to an idea we've talked about previously, that of secondary character, or what Robert Musil presaged as the "without content" as it relates to humanism, a cultural shift where we no longer have access to the genre forms that we might have previously ruptured, when the agonistic, and even parodic relationships to genre and narrative are no longer available or productive. In other words, what happens when the Brechtian sense of didactic or informative rupture is no longer available?

Part of the problem is to do with exchange. And I don't mean an exchange of money, but exchange as an aspect of cultural practice. What I've done is include documentation and description of these parallel projects alongside everything else I did to try to give it some form of correspondence or enforced conversation with my other modes of production, playing with the level of exchange.

You've called that a lobbying strategy before. The notion you're lobbying for someone else, but who that person is might be left out of the equation to some degree.

Yes, precisely.

But what does that mean for a socio-economic and consumer public that in many ways increasingly does not have a face or even familiar social guise? Here, I'm talking about the extent of collective abstraction where in film, video, and other advertorial kind of scenarios, it has gotten to the point of referring to "extras," the people in the background, as literally "BG" for "background." The on-set call for people to enact public scenarios is now "BG." This seems related to digital shifts in production of course, but also speaks of an utter abstraction in relation to questions of public and the habitus of political behavior. This slip from "extras" to "BG" supersedes the secondary register of playing with and off of genre forms. And this leads me to think about what a series of secondary positions looks like when gathered, how can you collectivize secondary representation against such erasing and hegemonic abstractions as "BG" and "data visualization"?

The thing I've been doing is to tend to stay away or disappear. I realized I don't want to be seen as being responsible for the given structure, which is almost the opposite of how you're supposed to function as an artist.

And I have to work out what I think about that. Because what happens when you hide during the presentation of something, or you disappear, or you become hard to reach, is that people still come to you. It's a nuanced problem. The reason they come to you is because they have something they need or something they want to tell you. So, I have to work out my relationship to the background, or to the extras, or how I stand in relation to that. For many artists in the past that has led to "I'm going to take responsibility for this and the way I'm going to do it is to show people what to do." This is an approach of "I will sit down first and I will stay there and I will demonstrate how to behave."

Again, the beta-participatory, demonstrative.

But I don't want to witness what takes place during the given moment or framework because I've been avoiding dealing with the thing you're talking about—the relationship between the extra, or the background, or the activated viewer, or the distracted presence. In each case, these works allow people to have their attention drawn to something else for which I am not responsible. The best way for me to behave is to not be there. If I'm there, then I'll be seen as somehow responsible for both the structure and the content. And to be honest, there's a group of people that already do this, which is architects. Architects disappear.

Yes, they tend to.

I need to work out a model of behavior that is different from this...because there are dangers in that architects tend to be men of a certain age, who can read.

Yes, if there's any profession that still tends to argue for the existence of a heroic genre to be grasped and held on to, in the manner of "tradition and the individual talent," it has to be architects.

This is why last year I taught an experimental architecture course alongside a professor at an advanced architecture program within a very good university. But I found the assumption was that the best model for building anything was a pavilion, some kind of space where people could gather without reflecting on context. It shouldn't be public housing or something else, but rather it should be the pavilion. This betrayed a further assumption that things cannot be done anymore and the pavilion is the ultimate expression of the temporary. This included the assumed behavior of people as either witnessing a spectacle or getting involved in some kind of discourse or dialogue. By choosing the latter, of course, it didn't matter what that dialogue was. It was enough to trust that if you gave them something, the audience would come and people would do something. These two assumptions (spectacle or discourse) seem very problematic. I have to address, in the near future, some of these issues.

This idea of temporary engagement or duration gets at a contradictory dynamic within exhibition-making today that your involvement in

exhibition design complicates. When the Ludlow 38 space opened in 2008 through to when I think they took out the stair structure in 2010, the boundary principle of the stairs imposed a behavioral presence that existed over a number of seasons. It was incorporated in a series of very interesting shows and display decisions. And, if you look at it from a durational standpoint, this imposition and incorporation into display gave your contribution a multiple stance that is quite different than a discursive symposium or even a show featuring one of your platform and bench scenarios.

That's because it's part of a less discussed thing. It's related to how I've often designed gallery graphics as a level of intervention that elongates a gesture, as with Galerie Meyer Kainer, Esther Schipper, Casey Kaplan, and Air de Paris. That seems connected to what we're talking about.

Yes, because it involves a different notion of address/addressee. It has a different durational register, and so a different effect of audience and public. This isn't unrelated to the idea of an editorial agenda but here it is more disguised.

The problem is that the specific editorial agenda discussed earlier assumes that there is probably something wrong with the idea of a certain type of artistic ego or a certain type of persona. It assumes certain collectivist things that are not necessarily good. That's part of the tension of my involvement. I can't assume that everything collective is good. For example, I think Fluxus bears the part of flux in e-flux. And Fluxus has exactly this problem that it starts as a dynamic, which seems to be a somewhat freeform collection of people who intervene within other institutions and setups and provide durational and, sometimes, even catastrophic structures or deconstructions. But in order to continue that freeform collective sensibility, the best thing to do is to package it. This gives it some kind of aesthetic concretization that solidifies the anti-capitalist and freeform aspect of the whole thing. And what that does, if you talk to some people of that generation, they will say that the packaging under which they subsumed their ego or their potential removed the possibility to do other things. It removed the possibility to effectively, powerfully undermine or play with structures. And therefore you get conceptual art.

This is something that I'm thinking about all the time: to what extent to leave the dominant culture alone and to what extent to leave the dominant system of artistic validation and exchange untouched? Should we retire to a collectivist sensibility with the presumed knowledge that, at least, we're better people. I'm not sure about these things. But on the other hand, I'm concerned about these things. I find it very difficult. I find Occupy Wall Street very difficult in this way.

Don't you think on some level, the dynamic of what you've called the setup or the rollup—in early forms of theater it used to be called the fit-up—an in-flux form that can deploy immediate collectivity, has been central to how to engage political activism for a long time? And this gets

back to the question of a corporeal need—an expressed, visualized corporeal—that’s taking place in a lot of different parts of the world. And this urgency seems to ask something other than a consideration of the ethics of self-management and affective labor. Many people think this implies a gathering collective (once again) that does not retire from the moment of event.

A crucial thing here is that if you look at the way that art exists generally in the culture it is to be experienced either privately or publicly. And that leaves an enormous gap in between. In the last twenty-five years the old question of what was audience or who is something for has been left to organizations that are focused on consumer individuals, meaning the people who become data and not individuals. The individual appears only as a data apparition. If I keep turning up to MoMA everyday, they’ll be curious, monitoring that this guy that gets in for free turns up all the time at nine o’clock in the morning. My pattern of showing up will lead to something they might try to work out, but only in the analysis of a flow of data. This shift in audience and consumer strategies is slightly underestimated and under-discussed.

The relegating of audience (always a difficult question) to those following and re-forming data into consumer patterns has, in part, led to an algorithmic or predictive notion of audience and consumer that is much further embedded in the art context than we might want to think.

Yes, because if you deploy work in a public transport station, for example, you will get an audience because they have to walk past whatever it is to get from A to B. And most public-minded interventions, for example, have dissolved into relying on the fact that people might be walking past.

But this relates to a lot of overtly politically motivated artworks that borrow their energy from a socialized space or arena that is not necessarily addressed in the work but again exists more as an unexamined abstraction not unlike the “BG” principle really.

My deployment of secondary structures around which a series of events may or may not take place expressly takes up who is there rather than what is taking place. This comes from concrete historical interests. For example, I was always fascinated—before Ron Jones made a work about it—by the discussions between the Vietcong and the Americans about what shape their conference table ought to be for the Paris Peace Conference. The Americans, of course, felt it should be a long rectangular table with the Vietcong on side and the Americans on the other. The Vietcong thought it should be a circular table around which all parties could see each other and that this from would symbolize something. They came up with variants: triangular tables, wiggly tables, and so on. And on a banal level, I think these variants are not closed.

They’re openings and contested ones that need to take an actual shape in

order to potentially occur, and they exist alongside or beneath more overtly didactic positions. This seems the case with some of the architectural motifs you've worked with as well. Overhangs, kiosks, tables, and benches aren't going anywhere. They are apparatuses that are going to be with us but they have both residual and immanent politics.

They're not recuperative, they're not reenactments, they're not based on anything. They try to set up situations, but it's kind of anti-enduring in its very nature. You have to remain skeptical about them. They also create for me a sense that they can be unsatisfying or difficult even though they might appear to be quite straightforward, smooth. The irony is that they carry with them some of the qualities that people use to talk historically about art. When you read the journal of an artist or a critic or a painter talking about something being on the edge of something and it being permanently unsatisfying and it being a feeling of an obligation, but one that cannot be justified.

We've discussed this idea of the unaccountable before. And how that also relates to politicized abstraction, for instance, in relation to a discussion we had about Blinky Palermo. His use of the readymade fabric was not just a painting gesture, it was of course of that, but it was also a socio-economic critical gesture aimed at re-directing the prevailing political rhetoric of "Wirtschaftswunder," the so-called West German economic miracle that elicited and circulated so many new middle class materials and products.

I've done a similar sort of thing. I use certain materials that are quite useless for certain things. For instance, the structures are not great for holding fundraisers. They appear to be generous but ...

But again they're more agonistic, actually.

Right. But I think people often misunderstand that word. They think agonistic has to do with confronting someone with something that is beyond the confines of everyday life, or beyond taste. I'm in a show right now called "Utopia Gesamtkunstwerk" in Vienna. The basic assumption of the show seems to be made through videos or pictures of people doing transgressive things. But in fact it's supposed to be a show about an agonistic approach towards the dominant narrative of art. Instead, it's people taking their clothes off, or throwing things at each other, or showing dead people, or blowing something up.

What's interesting about these provisional designs of yours is that they nevertheless provide a frame to highly content-driven work. Adam Curtis, for example, applies his editorial sense to politically fraught content, mixing wit and experimental and pop culture film techniques with journalistic research. As with Harun Farocki's background in television and the episodic necessity of having to think about production in perhaps more agile terms, or Alexander Kluge's involvement with television and his current online distribution of episodically structured content, these are

all generational examples of producers with televisual fidelity. But they've honed abilities to re-direct such coercive tactics. I was wondering what you thought about that approach. Because even the Harun Farocki show at MoMA, if you happened to see that, it wasn't primarily about presenting via an archival presentation. It was rather a compression tactic that felt like it could detonate that entire floor in comparison with a lot of other presentation strategies.

Some of that effect has to do with the fact that this period of television is now over. That kind of independent vision (as with Curtis) existing within what was usually a state-run enterprise or a corporate enterprise is done. A lot of people think of de-regulation as being exclusively about banking, but of course it was across the board and the BBC increasingly brought in independent production structures. The thinking is that this should have brought more radicality, and more autonomy, but it didn't and it doesn't. And this is because in order for the independent to survive within the corporate, the independent has to communicate with the corporate, and in order to do that the independent has to develop language that can persuade the corporate that it's not about the content of what's being produced, but merely about further development.

The effectiveness of the pitch becomes the content.

Right. Whereas what happened with these large enterprises in the past, they had something in common with universities, where you had certain forms of tenure that would allow eccentric production that was tolerated over many years because the idea of tenure could be judged at an early point. So, this generation has some rightful nostalgia for the exceptions that existed, but on another level, relatively speaking, this approach and these works are still quite radical when understood as art.

You can see a shift over to the art context probably because there's more of an audience there, isn't that also nostalgic in some ways for such work?

Yes, but I do believe that the art context can become this refuge for people who can't find another space to work in. And this confuses people who only think about art, this question of quality, or value, or what's the best, or what's the next move. The art context is a site in which it is possible to operate.

But this comes back to this question of audience, on one hand, and the relative status of the work in relation to all other work. I have to play with this a bit in my position. And I'm slightly dissatisfied with the options. The way the general discussion is directed at the moment, neither side, if you can say there are sides, wants to address what is there. One side of the art discussion views these exceptions cynically as merely extra stuff along the lines of doing a lecture or writing. It's not bad for you, but it's just extra stuff that can't be valued or exchanged any other way. While the other side appreciates that you're making a gesture, which apparently has a reduced ego and points towards the collective. I feel that both these

positions are slightly wrong. But in order to change them I'm not quite sure what to do. This relates to the argument that television is where people feel they can get this otherwise alienated audience that cannot read or understand the nuances of advanced art. But I'm not so sure.

I think you're right, there is an anachronism to the notion of counter-public that Curtis, Kluge, and Farocki enact in very different but related ways, but an anachronism they invest in and therefore continue to find spaces of address for. But it's not a television or cinema audience primarily. It's an art audience where the work employs televisual acuity.

But this relates to questions about why do this e-flux project with Adam Curtis as an exhibition, why do it when we can already watch it on YouTube? Especially, I've heard this from people under thirty. I would say, I'm perfectly aware of that, and that's where I watch them too, but the point is there's something about this point of designated watching. And once you've shown it, it's been done. Curtis has been shown in New York in the context of art, therefore—

Yes, and now thankfully Farocki has now been shown at MoMA, and therefore his films and videos are in their collection for future deployment. So, the idea that this is not of importance is a bit misguided.

But there's an assumption here that ethics must have immediate utility, and it's part of what made me reluctant to engage with the Occupy Wall Street artist group about how can we make better places to sleep in that police couldn't call a tent. I found it slightly distressing and I couldn't brainstorm this. Not to say I couldn't think of something, but my instinct would be to distract the police, to create another kind of problem. And what we're talking about are issues that are in various stages or steps, they're not equivalent. In fact, the strategies and processes required are actually quite different in each case. And it's this excess of differences and lack related to artistic collapse that is actually the potential.

Yes. But that's where this notion of exhibition can be too quickly foresworn and given over to the mall structure of certain museum ambitions. You can't give the conceptualizing and enacting of institutional exhibition space over to this array of consumer choices approach, to an all-purpose utility museum.

It is odd because art seems to be so much a history of over-determining and having to deal with given space.

It reminds me of the fact that Seth Siegelaub just put important publications from his archive and past production online via James Hoff and Miriam Katzeff's project Primary Information, including the so-called Xerox Book, a touchstone to conceptual art. And while those catalogues argued, in part, that the exhibition can happen via the extension of publication, or even in place of it, this didn't preclude or somehow absolve the actual exhibition space for Siegelaub or artists he

worked with. It was, instead, a dialectical relationship. When these were put on line in a sensitive and contextualized way, the Xerox Book received 25,000 downloads on the first day, a huge number. But one of the things you start to realize here is the importance of editorial sensibility and how the editorial can be responsive and create specificity, unique awareness, and access. And this does not preclude and it is not unrelated to the question of temporal, corporeal exhibition space. We need to see more institutional wherewithal being put behind a dialectic that starts to look at these things as going hand in hand more seriously. Otherwise, it's the marketing/mall impetus of a menu of options.

We're in the middle of quite clearly drawn battle lines, that don't get talked about very often. It's a big moment to make certain gestures and some people aren't quite aware of that.

Yes, unfortunately one side of the argument would say, hey we're actually creating the new next thing, but oddly this new thing is still to be defined by the size and stature of the building, its architect, and the spectacular programming, while the other side would be the editorial agenda or the institutional addenda that performs the editorial as pre-apology and nearly finished upon scheduling. But this seems a false division and behind the aesthetics of our time.

I'm looking around at things trying to figure out what's taking place. The consolidation of e-flux, for example, with a space that is frankly not very different from any other space, it could be a private gallery, and why that decision was made and what would it mean if they had done something completely different? The discussion in the past three years about hyper-capitalism and exchange, systems of flows of capital, tend to lose sight of the fact that if you look at the Forbes list of the top ten richest people in the world, they all sell cheap things to large numbers of people. They've snuck in under the radar. Among the ten richest people in the world, H&M, the Mexican mobile phone company guy, etc. These all involve exchanges on a low level that have aura reliability and low price. And they all involve displaced areas of production. I think the discussion has to move away from discussing pure capital flow and look more closely towards daily exchange.

In Warhol's Diaries he talks about 1980 and Julian Schnabel coming to his studio. He's struck by how pushy this person is and he realizes that while he's busy going around to parties, all these people like Schnabel are making and producing tons of work. At the same time, he's sure it will play itself out and he doesn't need to worry. He views himself as a product of his lifestyle choices and the emphasis on how things are produced. He ends up feeling that he will always outlast the opportunistic person who tries to hyper-identify with traditional artistic productions and roles. He just has to wait them out. For someone often viewed as the plastic person who is very synthetic, he's actually taking a long-term perspective.

Warhol saw that it wasn't just his time that he needed to be involved in,

but that he needed to involve production in the time of others. By seeing production time as a concept and an aesthetic plane, Warhol was able to elongate and open up certain aesthetic conventions.

Everyone always assumes that Warhol is fascinated by TV, but he describes a meeting with HBO or one of the cable channels in the early '80s and talks about how after ten minutes he wanted to leave because he didn't come there just to be insulted. They tell him that he's too quirky and won't play in the Midwest. And they have to do something in order to change the ideas, and he leaves. They think he's simply a populist that wants to reach out and be understood, which is not the case. In trying to get around some of the ideas we're talking about, I've been looking at the idea of genealogy and diary as actual records of the passage of time, mannerist records, but literally records of time. Thinking about this not as art in diary form, which is usually terrible, but more toward an idea of genealogical time.

This relates to “the genealogy of exchange,” a theme that was part of a recent class I taught, and how this complicates historical narrative in the art context. Basically, the approach being that if you look at the effects of an art context from a given time period—even the recent past—what you really find are complications of production, and reception, mutual difference, existing with needs for allegiance, needs for alliance. The kinds of things art can and should talk about. But this upsets a mutual dependency that is over-relied upon in contemporary art, namely the art historical discussion of representative figures versus the fluctuation of the market. We too often leave the genealogical complication out, which often means the terms of production are left out and much of the most incisive dialog.

A focus on the cultural as a way of understanding humans, and desire, and history, tends toward reification, tends towards what society would believe at any given moment is the highest production of that society, often seen as an artwork. And thereby even the best kind of Maoists or Marxists get caught up in this problem of the artwork rather than cultural production. And therefore you don't understand anything about the Centre Pompidou and why they hung a Renault 14 in the entrance when it opened and not a Van Gogh. But they did. When you walked into the Centre Pompidou in 1977, there was a Renault 14, otherwise known as “La Poire” hanging from the ceiling. And that told you a lot about their intentions and what they believed was significant.

And this relates to skipping over where and how the place of judgment and the place of taste resides within the genealogical trace. It is not solely belonging to the art historical and journalistic. In the always looking back register, when everything is made to look historically coherent or journalistically responsive, the genealogical can conversely reveal more about judgment, taste, and power. From figures as diverse as say Jean Rouch to Andy Warhol, you see an emphasis on creating a genealogical present in their work. And that takes you beyond Pop Art or cinema

vérité.

This emphasis is fascinating but hard. My starting point for a whole new body of work is the first and fragmentary novel of Karl Marx, which he wrote when he was nineteen, called *Scorpion and Phoenix*. Basically an attempt at a comic novel, or what passed for one in the 1830s, it's similar to *Tristram Shandy* in the sense it has a rambling endless style. But it is clearly a genealogy or an attempt at a parodic genealogy. And I'm trying to find a way to play with that. It relates to how when we're talking about these other projects, I'm not necessarily thinking about how to make a better space. I'm often thinking about the relationship between the Goethe-Institut as a quasi-autonomous agency in relation to the government of Germany, historically, and their desire to work with Volkswagen MINI to do something nearly the opposite of say Orchard Gallery around the corner at the time it began in 2008, Orchard being an offshoot of American Fine Art (AFA), where the last souls of that gallery found a home. Where Rebecca Quaytman could stand around during the openings and talk to people about the fact that she also had some ideas, and incidentally become...

The painter of our time, so to speak.

Exactly, and in being there, and seeing that all happen. This relates to what my work was about at the time.

I think that's the dynamism of genealogy. We can problematize how Orchard was almost instantly commodified, but that was, in part, due to an assertion of art historical importance the moment it opened because of who was involved: the genealogical awareness, the connection to Colin de Land and American Fine Arts. Orchard was many things, but it was centrally a statement by those involved that we're not going to lose that particular tracing, we're going to do something with it. The fact it was quickly picked up on and marketed and gave some people huge jumps in their career is a different discussion. It's certainly related, but it comes out of what people were responding to, namely genealogical sensitivity, and not market grandiosity.

I remember being at one of the early openings where there were never many people, like all classic events. I was with Carol Greene and she grabbed my arm and said, "we are at something that is... we're at something and we're the only ones that are here." She used that term, "Do you realize we are at something?" And, I said, "yes, I know, I understand."

One thing this really speaks to is sensibilities that go beyond claiming representative figures. Because one thing about Colin de Land and AFA is that you cannot say that everyone he showed had the same agenda, the same style, the same intensity. He was very aware of maintaining a platform of difference, fostering inconsistencies as an integral part of quality. There's no one artist that represents AFA then or now. Instead,

what you get is a kind of genealogical exchange. Orchard had that over a concentrated period of time. An important question that Orchard also brings up is what does it mean to have or insist upon a genealogical sophistication when everything is so sped up. AFA was, in some important ways, a model for not speeding up.

Yes, the kind of advanced critical curatorial response has been to use recuperation and reenactment, and work on the documentary and the archive and so on. At the same time, we're in a moment where even these things are at a fairly advanced state in regards to questions of time and speed.

That's why I brought up the 25,000 downloads of the Xerox Book. This is not simply a testament to everyone being suddenly obsessed with Seth Siegelaub. It's that the content is thoughtful, important, and James and Miriam have done something virtual that has a sensibility to it, and they've cultivated the interest in book form and now PDF format. In gaining the confidence of Seigelaub, over a number of years, the release shows that this relationship exemplifies an aspect of audience. This gets back to the Warholian idea of elongation rather than his quip about fifteen minutes of fame. 25,000 downloads on the first day doesn't mean let's now do this recuperative gesture every month. That would simply lead to exhaustion a la the hyper-productivity of Schnabel. And I think that was somewhat true of Orchard as well. It was actually an understanding that genealogical self-awareness could bring a hypersensitivity (and with it perhaps some pitfalls) to the table. This relates back to questions of scale, which I started with. Some of these projects that you worked on, as in the case of Ludlow 38 and Tobi Maier's projects during his time there, deployed exactly this archival sensibility, a recuperation of artists that should be seen and discussed more. Jiri Kovanda, Július Koller, Józef Robakowski, Lili Dujourie, Kriwet, the list goes on. It's a connoisseurship of recuperation, and one attentive to scale that makes the factory scenario seem a bit absurd.

But there are people who think they are doing the latter. And so layers of delusion are multiple. People think there are layers of art that are multiple, but in fact there are layers of delusion that are multiple. There are no layers of art. It's quite simple.

Genealogical hypersensitivity and archival re-animation are certainly things to be thinking about—and Hans Ulrich Obrist is acutely right about that—but it's also this related question of the editorial I think. Some younger artists often don't have an editorial take beyond a mild or disinterested concern for a journalistic understanding of how to use reference, citation, and relativity. And if you read the New York Times or listened to NPR during the first Bush election, it's not hard to understand how such disillusionment springs from normative, complacent idea of what an editorial stance might be. But as with the insistence upon doing an Adam Curtis exhibition rather than just publishing an essay with online links, the editorial has to be re-configured to be more responsive

and involved in art today.

The reason why this developed culturally was so that you could be in Kansas and read clearly the writing that was from New York or Chicago or whatever center was under review, or viewed as important at the time. And this reminds me of Lawrence Weiner, who I talk to a lot and who is important in all of this.

Lawrence responds to this through a form of stating things and relationships, and I have a similar method in terms of how to deal with various levels of engagement. When teaching, students often think the problem is how to create space for work and how to have the opportunity to be free, but in fact the problem is how to remain critical because the system tends towards reification regardless of whether or not you resist it. For example, when I do projects like the ones you brought up, the value system doesn't know how to deal with them. I have to either enforce something like I did in Munich for the project I did with Maria Lind in 2003 *Telling Histories*, where I gave the entire show as an artist donation. Similarly, when I did the Edgar Schmitz show at the ICA in London, I made an agreement with the ICA that the materials used to build frame the content had to be brought back by the people who provided the materials—the lumber, and all of it. Not solely because of some ecological concern but much more due to this question of exchange. I wanted to find another model of exchange for that set of physical material objects within the culture after the event. In Munich, it was to just to offer it as fundraising, and at the ICA it was to take everything apart and give it back to the people who had given it to them in the first place. But with the projects in New York, it's been more difficult to come up with a similar game, much more difficult.

Perhaps because everything is much more attended to and thereby attenuated by the market here.

At the e-flux opening, I jokingly asked where's the pricelist? I was half serious. The pricelist used to be a NY insistence, a bit like the thing in the elevator, the certificate of safety inspection in the office.

To me this relates to not giving up “curating” to some newly termed “curatorial” or even worse “paracuratorial” emphasis on the adjectival. But rather to emphasize the hand in hand importance of exhibition-making and editorial responsiveness, while also insisting that the barely disguised collusion between art historical methods and market methods acknowledge and open up some territory and support for more genealogical sensitivity.

Well, I'm sometimes hoping that when I'm working on something it will be the end of it. That we can draw a line under it afterwards, but much of what we're talking about leaves tiny steps.

The question of when should you give up the ghosts of certain concepts is actually a helpful one, and an ethical one. Curatorially speaking, you

have to have aesthetic, connoisseurial skills, but you also have to have pragmatic skills that can translate, and you have to be sensitive to the transitive expectation of a message or code that most artists carry to varying degrees. And yet, on the other side of it, you have to be aware of the fact that exhibitions are also constitutive, they do become a thing, the exhibition is an event, and it does have a frame. It is there. But this is not either/or. Poesis and the transitive emphasis is arguably one of the most essential things about art, but it doesn't happen without the constitutive, the frame. And if we don't see those two things as dialectically related we're in trouble because it ends up giving responsibility for the frame up to the voices of marketing. That shouldn't be the only claim.

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