HISTORY, IMMATERIALITY AND MEDIATION: HOW CAN WE PRACTICE “THE CURATORIAL” TODAY?

5-6 March 2011 in Gothenburg

A symposium on how to perform the curatorial within art in order to try to conceive of curating beyond art, towards the cross-disciplinary. As part of Performing the Curatorial: A research project on “the curatorial” within and beyond art, November 2010-March 2012.

Interest in post-Fordist service and information-oriented working methods is evident within contemporary art. How can this form of immateriality be read into cultural heritage questions concerning, for example, the history of consciousness but also the interest in history among artists today? In contemporary art and curating, how can we understand the privileging of the archive and the library over collections of objects, and what implications might this have for other disciplines? What is the function of mediation and the mediator within such a preference? And not least, what does this mean if we want to practice “the curatorial”?

Location: The Schildknecht Theatre, Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg, Fågelsången 1

Saturday 5 March
13:00-13:30 Introduction Maria Lind
13:30-14:30 Presentation Helmut Draxler
14:30-15:00 Break
15:00-16:00 Presentation Eungie Joo
16:00-17:00 Presentation Clémentine Deliss
17:00-19:00 Discussions/workshops in smaller groups

Sunday 6 March
11:00-11:30 Recapitulation Fredrik Svensk
11:30-12:30 Presentation Boris Buden
12:30-13:30 Lunch
13:30-14:30 Presentation Marion von Osten
14:30-16:00 Round-up with everybody

Moderator Fredrik Svensk

For reservations please contact johan.oberg@konst.gu.se

Graphic and spatial design: Luca Frei
As regards contemporary art, the curator’s mediating function, or translation, has developed into curating, or even a curatorial praxis. The specific competence created by this praxis “the curatorial” can, on the one hand, be described as one typical of its time, and on the other, as a competence whose relevance stretches beyond contemporary art. The curatorial is akin to that methodology used by artists focusing on the post-production approach – that is, the principles of montage, with disparate images, objects as well as other material and immaterial phenomena that are brought together within a particular time and space-related framework. But what function do art and artists have within “the curatorial”? Because the curatorial has clear performative sides, it also includes elements of choreography, orchestration and administrative logistics – like all practitioners working with defining, preserving and mediating cultural heritage in a wider sense. Is curating therefore essentially an act of translation? If so, with what purpose, and can it be performed elsewhere?

Boris Buden

Curator as Translator

Curator as translator? Sounds very trendy. The concept of translation has become today “the metaphor of metaphor” that stands for all sorts of mediation. Not only a text written in one language is translated into a text written in another. A literary text is translated into a film, an idea into political action. Even a culture can be translated into another culture. Why not then think of curator as mediator between producers and consumers of art, a sort of translator who creates a common ground on which artists meet their audiences, artworks face public reception, art products find their consumers, etc? But what if translation has nothing to do with mediation? What if the very idea of curating as translating compels us to put in question the basic concept of a homogeneous art space, moreover the whole spatial imaginary that accompanies contemporary art? Similarly to translation every curatorial act is a repeating that results in something new. It works with citation, which is “shifting something elsewhere” and at the same time “assembling or bundling together”. Isn’t this how the so-called cultural heritage is made and how curator becomes a cultural creator?

Helmut Draxler

The Drifting of Desires: Mediation as Institutional Practice

Today, mediation is omnipresent: whether as mediation of mental, social or cross-cultural conflicts, as a didactization of art and science or as a reform in politics and administration. It is mostly about particular techniques that educate the increasingly institutionalized and functionally differentiated realities in the areas of politics, law, science or culture. The goal of these techniques is to prove that these realities’ value assessments are legitimate on a cross-social scale.

Traditionally, mediation referred to something that was not mediated, i.e. something deprived of any mediation, such as the sacred, a mystic form of authority or
autonomously composed claims of meaning, truth or value, as it is the case in science and art. The nature of mediation increasingly shifts with the reproduction of such claims in the framework of the liberal-democratic constitution of modern societies. It no longer illustrates a usually unique, transgressive act, in which the “un-mediated” would appear, but rather a complex, finally interminable procedure of adjustment of variable social ambitions and interests. Mediation thus established itself as its own political, social, medial and cultural reality, as a decisive moment of integration of modern societies.

Eungie Joo

Idle hands

As the professional field of curating expands through the development of a defined discipline and institutions of art in the United States continue to fight for philanthropic, corporate, popular, and government support, curators may be in danger of becoming what Philippe Vergne has called “exhibition machines”. This status quo demands numbers, spectacle, and outcomes. But beyond the measurable outcomes of business, how can the development of a curatorial practice aspire to a more responsive and productive relationship to the contemporary art practices of artists? How can independent and institutional efforts use the valuable resources and real estate of public spaces to engage with art as an ongoing process of ideas? How can “the curatorial” propel contemporary art in conversation with artists rather than by disciplining the interpretation of art for audiences? This presentation will discuss a few efforts to execute a curatorial practice that looks beyond the production of objects and exhibitions as the resolution of art including the artist-financed temporary space, Six Months: Crenshaw; Haegue Yang’s presentation at the Korean Pavilion for the 53rd Venice Biennale; and the New Museum’s public programs Propositions and RE:NEW RE:PLAY.

Clémetine Deliss

Stored Code: One step forward in remediating collections in a post-ethnographic museum

Writing in 1915, Carl Einstein, the German theoretician of African art contemporaneous with Walter Benjamin and Aby Warburg, declared that museums were the foundation for living schools. Einstein argued against the idea that works of art from the past possessed a kind of material and sentimental immortality. Instead, he wanted to nurture an intellectual lifeline between the museum and the research institute. The greatest strength of a collection, he wrote, lay in its mobility. In other words: in the intentional act of switching the position of exhibits back and forth between analysis, interpretation and public visibility. The itinerancy of objects would encourage rigour, make people look again, understand better what they saw, and take apart what they believed or assumed. Collections would reflect the extremes of intellectual exploration and exhibitions would speak of human experience and knowledge. If not, he claimed, museums would become nothing more than “preserve jars“, and “anesthetize and rigidify into a myth of guaranteed continuity, into the drunken slumber of the mechanical”.

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
VALAND SCHOOL OF FINE ART
Established in 1904 by the citizens of Frankfurt, today the Weltkulturen Museum houses 67,000 objects, 120,000 photographic images, and a library with over 50,000 books and magazines. Nearly one hundred years after Carl Einstein’s progressive charter for museums, the challenge of the Weltkulturen is to remediate the objects and images in its collection by engaging once again with tentative and innovatory forms of inquiry and production. The term remediate, introduced by anthropologist Paul Rabinow, belongs to the conceptual tool kit of the Weltkulturen with its new “Labor” that provides the framework for future research and curatorial planning in this post-ethnographic museum. Stored Code is the title of the first exhibition to open in November 2011. Antje Majewski, Otobong Nkanga, Pablo Leon de la Barra, Thomas Bayrle, Marc Camille Chaimowicz, Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky, and Dieter Roelstraete are some of the artists and curators invited to work in the Labor.

Marion von Osten

Projekt Migration

Migration processes are part of the European experience and the history of nation-states. The extent to which migration has influenced society and played a constitutive role in the history of Germany and the process of Europeanization is hardly rooted in the consciousness of the public. Due to the policies of labor force recruitment promoted in the Federal Republic of Germany in the post-war era and the contract labor regulations of the German Democratic Republic, over five million people with complex migration experiences live in Germany today. They have had a substantial impact on German history, economics and everyday culture. The fall of the wall brought about new patterns of movement and residency, which have taken on a global dimension since 1989 and opened up new perspectives, discourses and lines of conflict.

The Projekt Migration exhibition was only one result of an ongoing research process starting in spring 2003. The exhibition opened on 30 September 2005 and took place in three central locations in Cologne, three buildings that were built in the 1950s and 1960s and embodied the hope of post-war modernity in their architecture. The exhibition spaces were synchronously designed – according to topic rather than to chronology. This method permitted reference to the possible continuities and reminiscences of the period after 1955 (1st post-war recruitment surge with Italy), but also breaches of, and contradictions within, the individual phases of the German and European migration dynamic. Not only the different materials used by the project partners, but also the different types of exhibition—be it photography, document, experimental film or artistic work—can be brought together in a dialogue of contents. Hence, the exhibition assumed a superior perspective, which even allowed us to see migration as a driving force of social change in Germany and Europe. The basis of the exhibition concept was developed by Kathrin Rhomberg, Aytac Eryilmaz, Martin Rapp, Regina Röhmhild and Marion von Osten. Scientific and artistic productions have been commissioned, which gave conceptual shape to, and implemented, the individual project results. To round this off, artists were invited...
to exhibit existing works. The exhibition opened up a myriad of methodical means of access.

SELF-PRESENTATIONS

Boris Buden is a writer and cultural critic based in Berlin. He studied philosophy in Zagreb and received his PhD in cultural theory from Humboldt University in Berlin. In the 1990s he was editor of the magazine Arkzin in Zagreb. His essays and articles cover the topics of philosophy, politics, cultural and art criticism. Among his translations into Croatian are some of the most important works of Sigmund Freud. Buden is a board member of the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies in Vienna (http://www.eipcp.net/). His research is currently focused on two main topics: contemporary concepts of linguistic and cultural translation and the politics and culture of the post-Communist condition. He has participated in various international conferences and art projects in Western and Eastern Europe, Asia and USA, including Documenta XI. Buden has lectured at universities in Europe and USA. He is co-editor of several books and the author of Barikade, Zagreb 1996/1997; Kaptolski Kolodvor, Belgrade 2001; Der Schacht von Babel, (The Pit of Babel), Berlin 2004; Übersetzung: Das Versprechen eines Begriffs, (The Promise of a Concept), (Together with S. Nowotny), Vienna 2008; Zone des Übergangs. Vom Ende des Postkommunismus, (The Zone of Transition. On the End of Post-Communism), Frankfurt/Main 2009.


**Luca Frei** is an artist based in Malmö and Berlin. Frei uses a range of media including installation, performance, drawing and text. His practice is concerned with the ways in which art might provide a measure of agency by creating alternative spaces designed to encourage free learning and emancipatory practices. His projects are usually developed in response to a specific context, compelling Frei to adapt his approach according to given situations. His works explore the borders between art as an autonomous aesthetic practice and as a shared public process. They often take the form of staged environments or structures that invite public participation and dialogue, while eschewing the ideological designs of grand utopian visions. Inspired by alternative pedagogical models, Frei’s works elicit an active engagement characterized by play and associative thinking, privileging a learning process based on independent reflection and experience. Luca Frei has recently presented solo exhibitions at Balice Hertling, Paris (2009 and 2010), the Swiss Institute, Milan (2009), Studio Dabbeni, Lugano (2008) and Lunds Konsthall, Lund (2008). His work has also been shown as part of the 12th Cairo Biennial, Cairo (2010), “Modernauställningen” at Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2010), “From Dusk till Dawn” at Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven (2010), “The Incidental Person” at Apexart, New York (2009), “Textiles, Art and The Social Fabric” at M HKA, Antwerp (2009), “Audio, Video, Disco” at Kunsthalle Zurich (2009), “Archaeology of Longing” at Kadist Art Foundation, Paris (2008), the 3rd Prague Biennial, Prague (2007) and the 9th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul (2005). www.lucafrei.info

**Eungie Joo** is Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Programs at the New Museum, where she has spearheaded the Museum as Hub, a partnership of six international arts organizations that supports art activities and experimentation; explores artistic, curatorial, and institutional practice; and serves as an important resource for the public to learn about contemporary art from around the world. As part of the Museum as Hub, Joo commissioned the yearlong Night School project by Anton Vidokle; a “Post Living Anti Action Theater” (PoLAAT) residency with My Barbarian; and launched the Propositions seminar series—a public forum that considers contemporary artists’s ideas in early development; among other commissions. Joo received the Walter Hopps Award for Curatorial Achievement in 2006. In 2009, she organized Nikhil Chopra’s performance and exhibition Yog Raj Chitrikar: Memory Drawing IX at the New Museum and served as commissioner for the Korean Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale, presenting the solo exhibition Condensation: Haegue Yang. Joo was previously Director and Curator of the Gallery at REDCAT, Los Angeles, from 2003 to 2007. She completed a doctorate in Ethnic Studies at the University of California at Berkeley in 2002 and a BA in Africana Studies from Vassar College in 1991. Joo co-edited the publication Rethinking Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education, co-published by New Museum and Routledge (2010). She is curator of the 2012 New Museum Triennial, “The Generational.”
Marion von Osten is an artist, curator and writer. Her main research interests concern the cultural production in post-colonial societies, technologies of the self, and the governance of mobility. She is a founding member of Labor k3000, kpD-kleines post-fordistisches Drama, and the Center for Post-Colonial Knowledge and Culture, Berlin. Since 2006 she is Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. From 1999–2006 she was Professor and researcher at the Institute for the Theory of Art and Design, ZHdK, Zürich and from 1996-1998, curator at Shedhalle Zurich. Recent projects include: In the Desert of Modernity – Colonial Planning and After, House of World Cultures, Berlin and Abattoirs, Casablanca, 2008–2009 (with Tom Avermate & Serhat Karakayali); <reformpause>, Kunstraum of the University of Lüneburg, Lüneburg, 2006; Projekt Migration (with Kathrin Rhomberg) and TRANSIT MIGRATION, Cologne, 2002–2006; Atelier Europa, Kunstverein München, Munich, 2004; and Be Creative! The Creative Imperative!, Museum for Design, Zurich, 2003. Her publications include: The Colonial Modern (with Tom Avermate & Serhat Karakayali, 2010), Das Erziehungsbild (with Tom Holert, 2010); Projekt Migration (with Aytac Eriyilmaz, Martin Rapp, Kathrin Rhomberg & Regina Röhmhild, 2005); Norm der Abweichung [Norm of Deviation] (2003); and MoneyNations (with Peter Spillmann) (2003). Von Osten lives and works in Berlin and Vienna.

Fredrik Svensk works as a critic, writer and lecturer. At Valand School of Fine Arts, University of Gothenburg, he is running the Art- and Culture Theory MA Programme, with a special focus on the intersection between artistic practice & research, history of aesthetics and art, queer feminist- and post-colonial theory as well as biopolitics, contemporary Marxism and institutional critique. In his research he is currently focusing on the politics and aesthetics of alternative art educational formats, as well as critical writing on paratexts of art exhibitions. Svensk is also member of the OTCOP – a group, investigating the conditions of production today, at Baltic Art Centre, Visby. 2004-2007 he was an editor at Paletten Art Journal, and has been contributing to journals, books and newspapers such as: Glänta, SITE, Sarai, Neue Review, Anarchitecture, Vector, Art Monitor, Paris, Res Publica, Göteborgs-Posten and Aftonbladet. He is a member of the editorial board at Kunstkritikk.no. He is the co-translator of Gilles Deleuze’s Différence et RÉpétition. In collaboration with Lisa Rosendahl & Henrik Andersson he worked as a curator at the Röda Sten Konsthall, Gothenburg (2006-2008) with projects just as: ÄKTA VARA (true being / true commodity) 2007 with works by Debora Elghelom, Annika Eriksson, Isabell Heimerdinger, Saskia Holmkvist, Katya Sander and Carey Young. ART AFTER EDUCATION, 2008 with works by Adrian Piper, Elke Marhöfer, Ida Börjel, Malmö Free University for Women.
Seminar I: Monday 15 November, 2010

What, how and when is the curatorial?

Lecture by the artist Doug Ashford (New York) on working with the artists’ collective Group Material on pioneering and cross-disciplinary exhibitions in the US between 1979 and 1996. Lecture by the curator Maria Lind (Stockholm) on the historical functions of the curator and the growth of the concept “the curatorial”. Screening of the artist Philippe Parreno’s film “June 8, 1968” and the artist Hito Steyerl’s film “November”. Discussion.

Seminar II: Thursday 20 January, 2011

Showing showing: Archival practices and immaterial work

Lecture by Beatrice von Bismarck (Leipzig/Berlin), art historian, curator and director of the new Masters Programme, Cultures of the Curatorial, at the Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig. Von Bismarck lectured on how artists have been working with archive material and “immateriality” since the 1960s. How can the tension between material and immaterial cultural heritage be considered in relation to, for example, the movement of Conceptual art away from the object and the permanent, towards what the curator and writer Lucy Lippard at the end of the 1960s called “the dematerialization of the art object”? Discussion.

Performing the Curatorial is a research project under the aegis of Cultural Heritage seminars at the University of Gothenburg, a gathering point for the critical scholarly examination of and artistic perspectives on questions of cultural heritage.

Curator: Maria Lind

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