

V. Artist as Anthropologist

“Today, it seems interesting to me to go back to what I would call an animist conception of subjectivity, if need be through neurotic phenomena, religious rituals, or aesthetic phenomena. How does subjectivity locate on the side of the subject and on the side of the object? How can it simultaneously singularize an individual, a group of individuals, and also be assembled to space, architecture and all other cosmic assemblages?” - Felix Guattari [Lazarato & Melitopoulos]

New New

Since the stone age, there has been evidence and knowledge of art having a role in culture of human-kind, and the role of art has gone through infinite transformations, initially serving as a tool for fertility, hunting, narration, ritual in indigenous and ancient cultures, to idealism, ideology, religion and explorations of beauty, balance and perfect proportions in classical time periods. Each of these movements lasted long periods of time, from 100 years to thousands of years, maintaining the same motives and values. It wasn't until Realism that the movements in the history of art began to change pace, becoming shorter in duration while also radically challenging the values of movements that came before. Modernism is a period of time in art that encompassed a succession of styles and movements, each rejecting the past as a model for the art of the present, characterized by constant innovation.

Boris Groys deconstructs the modern and contemporary methods of creative production in his book *Art Power*, beginning with the statement that “the first thing one learns by reading the majority of texts on modern and contemporary art is this: both modern and, even to a greater extent, contemporary art are radically pluralistic.”[Groys, 2008 (1) 1] From the beginning of modernism until now, any attempt by critics or art historians to formulate a theoretical definition of art in general has quite quickly provoked various attempts by artists of the time to produce an artwork that would challenge this definition. The nature of modern arts conception was founded in the goal of contradicting all other artworks in one way or another. An artwork was only considered relevant and recognized by the institution of art if it presented a contradictory position to what was understood to be art at that time. So actually, “the field of modern art is not a pluralistic field so much

as it is a field strictly structured according to the logic of contradiction. It is a field where every thesis is supposed to be confronted with its antithesis. In the ideal case, the representation of thesis and antithesis should be perfectly balanced so that they sum zero.”[Groys, 2008 (1) 9] Modernisms crossed-out-god meant that there was no longer an overarching power in the world that could be perceived as being infinitely more powerful than any other power. Instead, the atheistic, humanistic, enlightened, modern believes in the balance of power and modern art is simply a conscious or unconscious expression of this belief. This belief in the balance of power is inherently regulatory as it automatically favors anything that establishes or maintains this balance of power and excludes or tries to outweigh anything that distorts it by becoming too powerful. “If there is no image that could function as a representative of an infinite power, then all images are equal. And, indeed, contemporary art has the equality of all the images at its telos.”[Groys, 2008 (1) 10]

There are only differences as far as the eye can see. And because of this, participants must make a choice and be committed to their decision with an understanding that they will ultimately be contradicted or even being accused of merely advertising for one’s favorite artists in hopes of advancing whatever commercial success may come of it within the art market. There is a serious question of sincerity here. “Already Malevich said that he was struggling against the sincerity of the artist. And Broodthaers said, when he started to do art, that he wanted to do something insincere. To be insincere means in this context to make art beyond taste, even beyond one’s own taste.” [Groys, 2008 (1) 10] The pluralism of contemporary art is an excess of taste, an excess of creative democratic equality, which inevitably makes it an embodiment of paradox. Contradiction can be found in general in the art world, but also in an individual artists practice, down to individual artworks themselves. Individual artworks have become paradox objects, embodying both thesis and antithesis, as an experience of plurality which seems to provide the viewer with an infinite number of options on what to like and how to think. But, as Boris Groys states, this appearance of infinite interpretations and viewpoints is only an illusion. In fact, there is only one correct interpretation that the artists impose on the spectator, that as paradox-objects, the works require, in turn, a paradoxical and self-contradictory reaction from the viewer. “The only adequate interpretation of a paradox is a paradoxical interpretation.”[Groys, 2008 (1) 4] One of the deepest difficulties in dealing with modern art rests in our unwillingness to accept self-contradictions and paradoxical interpretations as sufficient. But this unwillingness must be overcome so that we can see modern and contemporary art for what it is, namely a paradoxical entity governing the balance of power. We are in the image and a critique of the image at the same time. The desire to get rid of any image can be realized only through a new image, the image of a critique of the image. “The alleged pluralism of modern and contemporary

art makes any discourse on it ultimately futile and frustrating. This fact alone is reason enough to put the dogma of pluralism in question”[Groys, 2008 (1) 1]

Perhaps the question that may be asked here is the one that is posed by post-modern psychology when reflecting on modernisms ‘truth’ bearing efforts; when considering arguments of post modern arts pragmatic, practical capacity, we ask: what does it accomplish in cultural life? What institutions does it represent? And what does it silence? The art of the contemporary modern world is just the offspring of the modern world in general; of course in a world proliferated with hybrids and images to contradict hybrids and images, this mentality will be translated to the values and ethics of art production. “The ‘post-mods’ are the end of history, and the most amusing part is that they really believe it. They are simply stuck in the impasse of all avant-gardes that have no more troops behind them. Let them sleep till the end of the millennium, as Baudriallard advocates, and let us move on to other things. Or rather, let us retrace our steps. Let us stop moving on” [Latour 1993 (2), 62] In a world where everyone is represented simultaneously, where all tastes are accepted, where difference is encouraged and there is an extreme balance of power, among images at least, it seems like a never-ending story, a hamster wheel. Art is now an entity that consists of numerous creative individuals doing their own thing, climbing their own ladder to reach the climate of their own career. Let us stop moving on? Even if we wanted to, I wonder if it’d be possible, as this would require a certain coagulation of power, which would be a sacrilege to this sacred democracy of pluralism. Art has become stuck incessantly inside the post-modern ouroboros.

In the last few decades, discourse on the impossibility of the new in art, due to the pluralistic tendencies of the time, has become especially widespread and influential, and strangely enough, the main characteristic of this discourse is a certain feeling of happiness, of positive excitement about the final relief from the need to be “new”. This “liberation from the obligation to be historically new seems to be a great victory of life over formerly predominant historical narratives which tended to subjugate, ideologize, and formalize reality.”[Groys, 2002 (2)] This positivity about the end of the new in art seems linked to another promise of bringing art back into life, reaching outside of the historical constructions and considerations and oppositions of old and new. Today, artists and theoreticians strive to be engaged politically and culturally in a social reality as a foundation on which to express their own cultural identity and desires. Artists want to be perceived as truly alive and real, as opposed to the dead that are continuously represented by the museum system and the art market. In his essay *On The New*, Boris Groys asks “When and under what conditions does art look as if it is alive and not as if it were dead?” [Groys, 2002 (2)] Modern art has a history of slander towards the museum, library or any institutional archive, in the name of “true” life. “In the texts of modern artists and theoreticians,

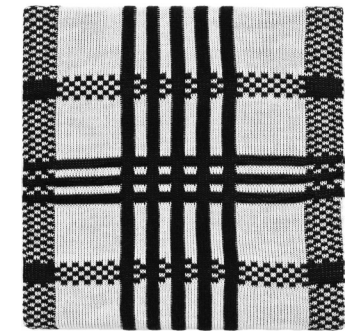
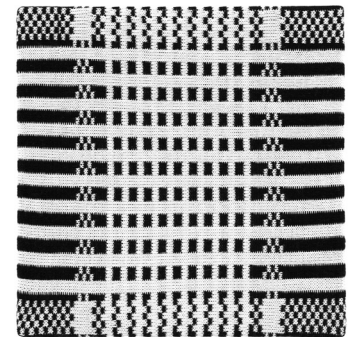
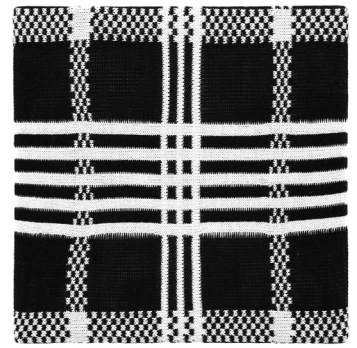
the museum is repeatedly described as a graveyard of art, and museum curators as gravediggers. If the museum dies, it is death itself that dies.” [Groys, 2002 (2)]

What does it mean for art to look as if it were alive? “Being alive” means to be “new”. Working within the realm of “high art” means that contemporary artists make decisions that they believe will lead to them eventually ending up in a museum’s collection. But, nowadays, the museum accepts only things that represent the life and time of culture that exists outside of its collections, art that is real and alive, in order to cannibalize them and turn them into dead products of the past. Anything presented in the museum is culturally understood to belong to the past, everything presented in the museum is dead. “Thus, the only possibility of being collected is by transcending the museum and entering life in the sense of making something different from that which has already been collected. The museum is, in this respect, like a church: you must first be a sinner to become a saint, otherwise you remain a plain, decent person with no chance of a career in the archives of God’s memory.”[Groys, 2002 (2)]

This is another paradox, one that lies in the relationship between artists and the museum; the more an artist wants to radically free themselves from the death of the museum, the more they are recognized and eventually become subjected in the most radical logic of museum collecting. This interpretation of the new, real and living contradicts a deep-rooted conviction within the history of art, one that is found in texts of the early modern avant-garde, which announces that “the way into life can be opened only by the destruction of the museum and by a radical, ecstatic deletion of the past, which stands between us and our present.”[Groys, 2002 (2)] An example presented here reflects on a time when the new Soviet government attempted to secure and save the collections of the old Russian museums out of fear that they would be destroyed by civil war and the general collapse of state institutions and the economy. Kazimir Malevich protested against these efforts, calling on the state not to intervene to protect the work of these museums. Malevich hated the monotonous museum collections and believed that their destruction could open the path to true, living art. He understood that a new, original, innovative art would be unacceptable for museum collections governed by the conventions of the past, because it is in the idea of historical representation that compels the museum system to collect. However, even up until now, this notion of historical representation has never been called into question by any theoretical movement, not even by post-modern writing, which claims to be on the path of the “historically new, truly contemporary and up-to-date”. As progressive as postmodern theorists like to think they are, they have ventured no further than the modern theorists or any previous movements for that matter, as long as they continue with the linear temporality of progress, and simply ask “who and what is new enough to represent our own time?”[Groys, 2002 (2)]

Strategies today could begin not with an attempt to break down walls to a greater freedom, but perhaps with the emerging of a new taboo, the “museum taboo”, which disallows the repetition of the old. The museum lays out a clear definition of what it means for art to look real, alive, present, by presenting what is not real, not alive and not present. In order to be collected, art cannot look like what has already been museographed. But today, Groys asserts that “to be really new, a new artwork should not repeat the old differences between art objects and ordinary things. By repeating these differences, it is possible only to create a different artwork, not a new artwork. A new artwork looks really new and alive only if it resembles, in a certain sense, every other ordinary, profane thing, or every other ordinary product of popular culture.”[Groys, 2002 (2)] Only in this case can the new artwork function as a representative for the world outside the museum walls and the new can be experienced only if it produces an effect of out-of-bounds infinity. An artwork that resembles the mundane to such an extent as Groys is proposing, depends on the clean and distinct space of the museum in order to achieve this effect of infinity. In the context of reality we would experience these “real”; ”mundane objects” as finite because we ourselves are finite, but in the museum, they become infinite. The museum essentially lets us imagine what is outside the museum as infinite, with artworks that function as windows to the infinite outside.

But, of course, because of this pluralistic time of paradoxes and contradictions, new artworks can fulfill the function of this window only for a short period of time before being replaced by a new window into infinity. There is a need to replace the old new with the new new; it’s a battle of the news. It is only the clean and preserved space of the museum that allows a production and exhibition of new differences, that is, differences beyond differences, differences which are emerging here and now, all the time. In reality itself we are confronted only with dead differences. “It is when an artwork looks like a ‘normal thing’ that it will require the contextualization and protection of the museum. The strategies of the artistic avant-garde, understood as the elimination of visual difference between artwork and profane thing, thus lead directly to the building-up of museums, which secure this difference institutionally. In the museum, ordinary objects are promised the difference they do not enjoy in reality, the difference beyond difference.”[Groys, 2002 (2)] Similar to what Bruno Latour mentions in *We Have Never Been Modern* in regards to temporality, Groys asserts that “we have to dissociate the concept of the new from the concept of history, and the term innovation from its association with the linearity of historical time.”[Groys, 2002 (2)] Instead of artistic innovation thinking in terms of temporal linearity and the progress that has or has not come with that, he proposes a consideration instead of the spatial relationship between the museum space and its outside. “The production of the new is merely a shifting of the boundaries between collected items and the profane objects outside the collection, which is primarily



Rosemarie Trockel *Untitled*, 1986 black and white wool on canvas. All images courtesy of the Rubell Family Collection. Examples of the new new; what makes these patterns “art” is their needs of the museum to draw attention to them as cultural objects. In the midst of everyday life outside of the museum, they would blend in and become invisible because of their likeness to other similar patterns.

a physical, material operation: some objects are brought into the museum system, while others are thrown out and land, let us say, in a garbage can.”[Groys, 2002 (2)] Such shifting produces again and again the effect of newness, openness, infinity, using signifiers that look different in respect to the musealized past and identical with mere things, popular cultural images circulating in the outside space.



Adrian van der Spelt, 1658
Trompe-l'Oeil Still Life with a Flower Garland and Curtain, Courtesy of <http://www.artic.edu/>



Adrian van der Spelt, 1658
Trompe-l'Oeil Still Life with a Flower Garland and Curtain, from a different angle. Courtesy of http://i_hate_life.blogspot.ch/2011_06_01_archive.html

As the museum is not only searching everyday for the new new to replace the old new, it is also attempting to restore the newness and life to its old, dead objects. The status of the museum as the site of a permanent collection is gradually changing as the museum has started to become, time and time again, theatre for large-scale traveling exhibitions or one time installations organized by international curators and individual artists. Something very interesting here is that each exhibition or installation of this kind is made with the intention of “designing a new order of historical memories”, proposing a new criteria for collecting by re-constructing history. Contemporary art consists of creating a specific context which can make a certain form or thing look other, new and interesting, even if this form has been seen before. The innovation here lies in putting a new form, a new thing, in this stable context or putting already existing artworks into new contexts by changing the display of an artwork to bring difference to its reception, without having to change the artwork’s visual form at all. Contemporary art works with the museum on the level of context, framework, background, or new theoretical interpretations; no matter if it is the display of a new work, or a re-presenting of an old work, both share the goal to create a contrast between form and historical background, to make the form look other and new.

“The new functions here not as a re-presentation of the “other” or as a next step towards a progressive clarification of the obscure, but rather as a new reminder that the obscure remains obscure, that the difference between real and simulated remains ambiguous, that the longevity of things is always endangered, that infinite doubt about the inner nature of things is insurmountable. The museum was always, and still remains, the only place for possible innovation.” [Groys, 2002 (2)] Opposed to what one might think, Groys asserts that the museum is not just a secondary reflection of what happened in reality once upon a time, in fact it is the reality itself that is secondary in relation to the museum. We understand ourselves based on what is presented to us in the museum; our image of reality is dependent on our knowledge absorbed from the museum. This is a strange pill to swallow, but it also brings up the point that any change in the museum collection can bring about change in our perception of reality itself!

Artists examine and manipulate form and language through their own investigations of identity and beauty. The creative practice of an artist can be a practice of seeing and creating relations between previously unrelated things, working with and playing with the roles and personalities of each, considering its patterns of interaction within the world. The process of production can often involve the artist to enter into a state of floating between one narrative and the next, suspending meaning and expanding their capacity to engage with chance. The creative practice of Michael E. Smith is one of a unique approach to form and language, as it addresses perception through abstractions of the materiality of domestic environments. He creates symbolic hybrids of familiar objects who are culturally unfamiliar to each other, or at least not in the type of relationships that are presented.

Some of the forms are formatically totemic, with materials stacked vertically on top of one another. Other forms are presented singularly, with a very particular attention paid to its placement. Smith's methods of cannibalizing materials explore the language of specific cultural entities that floats between embracement and rejection. In his exhibition at Kunstverein Hannover, Smith presented a series of sculptures, installations and videos in a space where all of the "wall texts, directional signs showing how to navigate the building, and any other communications media has been removed" as a ridding disencumberment of



Michael E. Smith installation view
Courtesy of Ladislav Zajac, KOW

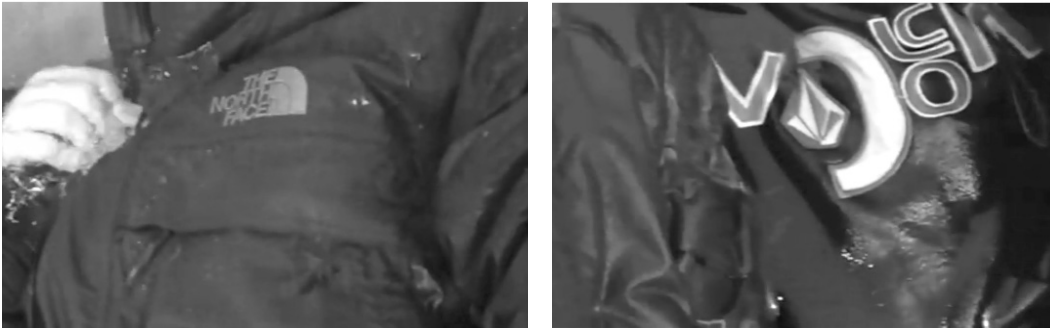


Michael E. Smith installation view Courtesy of Contemporary Art Daily

the space in order to “achieve a form of concentration, allowing the viewer to focus on what is essential”. [Contemporary Art Daily] Smith’s action of reducing any distracting elements within the exhibition space to a minimum is a significant and quite unique characteristic of his practice, one that is present in each of his exhibitions to date. There is a distinct importance placed on the hybridic autonomy of the combined elements, which is conditional to the cultural and personal language of the pure, molar entities, such as the blue and black wetsuits and the water heaters, in relation to each other and the surrounding spacial elements.

The constellation of works includes one assemblage of what looks like a wood door painted white, balanced impossibly on top of a spray paint can, which is placed precariously near the spaces entry way. Its vulnerability is reinforced by the adjacent black form hanging at shoulder height on the wall, which seems like a piece of a discarded car window frame, but also alludes to a discarded limb, an arm. In another room lays a large black sheet, flat on the ground with folds and imperfections highlighted by the mirroring skylight above. An acute contemplation of metaphor in semiotic and material language is evident not only in the sculptures and installations of the exhibition but also in the video work. Placed beneath a window of the gallery space is a monitor displaying a video of a fully clothed human, immersed in a fresh bathtub of water. The black and white Globes, The North Face, the Volcom, are completely engulfed in a state of relation between air and water that is manipulated by the wearers movement and prodding. The allusions presented, in this assemblage especially, provoke conversations that are particularly relevant in contemporary art disciplines, as well as economic, political, environmental and spiritual dialogues. Smith seems to have refined the art of the hybrid, which is a skill that allows for the viewer to be engaged and even mesmerized by form and space, while also being affected psychologically and/or emotionally by the language of their subtle and ambiguous yet evocative tendencies. His ability to adopt semiotics in such a way provides an opportunity for the viewer to contemplate the functions of things, but in a different way; to comfortably participate in an event of deterritorialization. His practice adopts the very real, and places it just on the edge of the table, teetering between stability and destruction in a place where imagination and mental wandering take the forefront; rational, linear thought is no longer





Michael E. Smith Video stills Courtesy of Contemporary Art Daily

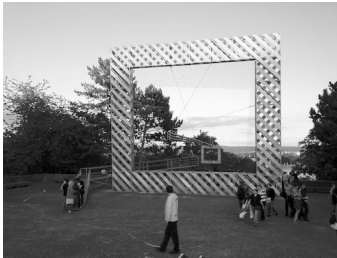
the only applicable means to understand, describe or discuss. In this realm, systems and languages take on malleable roles as they are broken down into vulnerable new forms. The function and reasoning of the mind work in a similar way as animism, influenced by the unconscious or superstitions, in a realm that is immaterial, floating indeterminately outside of “provable” information or thought processes, guided and built on varying combinations of inner logic and objectivity. The aesthetics of the work tend to be non-excessive as the artist tries to have the movement that is present in the work hold a place between organism and machine, comfortably. The sense of floating between two states can be also symbolic for a sort of giving up of trying to understand, a safe space to give in to the imagination. No crisis.

The *Animism Project*, led by curator Anselm Franke, is the result of a large scale collaborative effort between artists, writers, curators and institutions, which began to take shape in Antwerp, Belgium in 2006. The research and discourse that has been acquired since its initial conception is substantial, the project and its exhibition has travelled from institution to institution around the world, presenting to the public a unique look into the history of the term. “For most people who are still familiar with the term “animism” and hear it in the context of an exhibition, the word may bring to mind images of fetishes, totems, representations of a spirit-populated nature, tribal art, pre-modern rituals, and savagery. These images have forever left their imprint on the term. The expectations they trigger, however, are not what this project concerns. Animism doesn’t exhibit or discuss artifacts of cultural practices considered animist. Instead, it uses the term and its baggage as an optical device, a mirror in which the particular way modernity conceptualizes, implements, and transgresses boundaries can come into view.”[Franke, 2010 (2),11]

Animism recognizes the various boundaries set in place since the coining of the term by E.B Tylor in 1871, in an attempt to expose the roots, to interrogate the dividing lines that are still ever-present in contemporary modern societies. “The exhibition sees animism as a node, a knot that, that when untied, will help unpack the “riddle of modernity” in new ways, helping us to understand modernity as a mode of classifying and mapping the world by means of partitions, by a series of



Less Savage than Others is a public sculpture by Rosemarie Trockel which is made of two blocks of evergreen trees together next to a body of water, with a slim passage-way for visitors to pass through. Anselm Franks *Animism* project challenges the role of the museum and its influence on perspectives of reality, Rosemarie Trockel plays with the role of the museum both with her exhibitions presented in museum spaces, as well as her public installations. Does this piece need the museum? Perhaps it does not rely on the clean space of the museum, but it does still rely on the context of art to guarantee its cultural relevance, because its newness does not allow it to stand alone from any other lakeside shrub. Courtesy of skulptur-projekte.de



Frame Construction of Haus-Rucker-Co on Friedrichsplatz in Kassel is an outdoor public art installation that provides an emphasis of perspective. This piece serves as a window to the landscape of wherever it is installed. Like the *Animism* Project, it is questioning the role of the museum and its framing of nature and reality, providing just one viewpoint to see the world. Courtesy of anetteleenheer.wordpress.com



Moonhouse is a building by the artist Not Vital built in 2006 in Agadez, Niger. As this work is considered a work of art, it is also a building and a tool for viewing the movement of the moon. Courtesy of notvital.com

‘Great Divides.’” [Franke, 2010 (2),11] As opposed to investigating the spiritual and metaphysical effects of animation solely within the realm of aesthetics through a well organized and informative presentation of artifacts and artworks that exemplify different ways of addressing life or the life-like within the realm of the inanimate, as almost any museum exhibition in the past would have done when representing indigenous, pre modern cultures, the Animism exhibition targets this “unquestioned backdrop” against which this kind of discussion would normally take place. This backdrop is usually invisible, taken for granted or carefully kept at arms length, but the works in this exhibition seek to bring it front and center. One of the initial concerns of the Animism exhibition is addressed through a constellation of works that reveal the paradoxical position of the medium of “the exhibition”



Jimmy Durham *The Dangers of Petrification*, 1998–2007, stones, two knives, five ceramic plates, three wooden chopping boards and hand written papers. Courtesy of www.frieze.com/

itself and its relationship to the institution of the museum. “What is a museum if not a grand de-animating machine?” Whatever way an object may have been animated in its original context, this object, of course, will no longer play the same role when held within the confines of a museum and exhibition framework. This is by means of the process of dialectical reversal that is inscribed into these kinds of institutions, a dialectical reversal that de-animates the animates and animates the “dead”. In reflection to this, Animism attempts to actively imagine what a “quasi-anthropological” museum of the modern boundary practices might look like, one that does not necessarily follow the inlaid framework of the modern institution.

The linguistic and visual economy that makes up the Animism project is explicit and dynamic. Through the dedicated research of the curatorial team and

their collaborators, not only have they managed to gather a plethora of artworks and cultural artifacts into an exhibition that allows for a well rounded, critical, yet generous, visual narration of the history of animism and it's relation to the Western world, but they have also made great efforts to objectively provide a clear, comprehensive survey of the history of animism, through the release of various texts, press releases, lectures, etc. Anselm Franke and the team behind the *Animism project* have been highly instrumental in bringing to light the intricate workings of the modernist machine, inspiring critics, theorists and anthropologists to follow in the footsteps to the deconstruction of the modern world. "The various stages of the exhibition have shown the discourse of animism to be a crucial skeleton key for releasing the deadlocks formed by the repressed religious, teleological, and colonial foundations of modernity; the hysteria within its narrative that continues to shape the exhibition formats and sensibilities we are tethered to." [Franke, 2010 (3)]

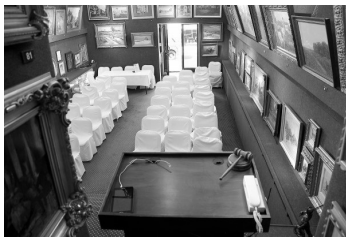
The Creative Practices of the Machinic Assemblage

In his book *Art Power*, Boris Groys touches on a crucial problem of pluralism that is defining the art of our postmodern world. We are working in a time where we are all equal, there is no hierarchy, among aesthetics at least, within the contemporary art discourse. All artists are given a fair shot to make it big. Although it seems we have become stopped in our tracks, perhaps it is more like we have transcended the modernist need for progress. Artists are happy with this pluralistic time, and the fact that there is no hierarchy, because they don't have to worry about being "new" anymore, well at least not in the same way that the historical movements of art used to need to be. There is a newly established equality, a democracy of tastes in the art world. The pluralism and absence of hierarchy of the art world seems quite parallel to the primary concerns of "new" animism, which are to establish a new equality between the modern and pre modern cultures, as well as human and non-human entities. When considering this parallel, I believe that we can apply these "new" animistic explorations of ensoulment and agency to the art experience, as a relatively new, or at least fresh, concept.

"With the affirmation of the inwardness of subjectivity, the individual steps out of the network of exchange relationships and exchange values, withdraws from the reality of bourgeois society, and enters another dimension of existence. Indeed, this escape from reality led it to an experience which could (and did) become a powerful force in invalidating the actually prevailing bourgeois values namely, by shifting the locus of the individuals realization from the domain of the performance

principle and the profit motive to that of the inner resources of the human being: passion, imagination, conscience. The radical qualities of art, that is to say, its indictment of the established reality and its invocation of the beautiful image of liberation, are grounded precisely in the dimension where art transcends its social determination and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behavior, while preserving its overwhelming presence...the world formed by art is recognized as a reality which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality”[Marcuse, 6]

There are two main components to consuming art; there is the objective consumption run by the material commodity of art, and there is the subjective consumption of the works essence. There is monetary value and then there is its invaluable contribution of experience. The art as commodity equates to nothing more than any other object of capitalism. Art from this perspective is used as an investment, decoration, entertainment, etc., serving as a backdrop within the sustaining proliferation of things. Monetary is limiting perceptually; it flattens the world to a world of fully conscious, objective consumption, a consumption that can even be quite violent, like factory farmed animals, made just to serve the industry, purchased, killed and eaten, just to become a part of its consumers body (of collected work).



Courtesy of www.agra-auctions.com/

With art as a commodity, the humans of the modern world are still in a safe space as the masters in control of the universe over the autonomy and agency of material. In this world, they are allowed to remain unchallenged within the comfort zones of the familiar, continuing to be governed by the only thing they know, capitalist value and commodity exchange. The influence of the market on any artists career is unavoidable, and this has spawned very interesting creative positions in its own right, but I find that it could be worth setting aside the status of the work as a commodity in order to investigate the potentials that lay within the experience of art subjectively. I believe that through investment and exploration into subjective contributions that occur through art production and consumption, art can be used to discover and reach new potentials as a device to challenge the hierarchical positions that man continues to maintain over material and nature, and act as a tool to further address the decolonization of thought in the Western world.

When considering arts relation to autonomy, “the quality or state of being self-governing” [Merriam-Webster (1)] and agency, “the power that is used for something to be achieved by a person or thing”[Merriam-Webster (1)] many theoreticians, philosophers and artists have contemplated the ability for art to have a self governing quality that can effect and be effected when presented to a consumer. Semiological or interpretive theories of art have always assumed that works of art are vehicles that actively present slightly obscure meaning through signs and symbols which the spectators decode on the basis of their familiarity with the semiological system used by the artist. Somehow, the responsibility is very often in the hands

of the artist or the artwork alone, to captivate, entertain, and speak with relatively rational coherence to the viewer. But, when considering arts relation to autonomy and agency, not many theoreticians, philosophers and artists have considered the autonomy that the consumer is equipped with when being confronted by an artwork. When viewing a work of art, what kind of responsibility does the consumer have? Is the effort put forth mutual between the consumer and the work? Or does the consumer simply assume a more passive role, taking it in, liking it or disliking it and then moving on to the next one on the wall? In contemplating the becomings of the machinic assemblage of Deleuze and Guattari and applying it to the experience of art, one can assert that in fact, the quality and type of experience that is generated through consuming a work of art, whether it be video, painting, sculpture, installation, performance, etc. is determined by the autonomy and agency of both the piece itself, as well as the consumer. When experiencing a work, the consumer of the work enters into a reciprocal relationship, a machinic assemblage, where they are part of something in which each component, the consumer, the painting, the wall, the surrounding space, etc. are all contributors. In this case, the autonomous consumer is responsible for his or her knowledge, taste and attitude that they bring forth, just as much as the autonomous work of art standing before him or her is responsible for its knowledge, taste and attitude. This perspective already resists any separation that may be caused by the hierarchical status of man over material, which ultimately always comes to a dead end in it's objectification and commodification anyways.

This perspective recognizes the work of art as animate matter, with autonomy and agency of its own, capable of reciprocal communication that in some cases can be gentle and quiet, and in other cases can be quite loud and in your face, demanding respect and attention. The viewer is consuming at the same time he or she is being consumed, as they participate in the conversation and animation of the



In the movie *Vertigo* by Alfred Hitchcock, Madeleine becomes transfixed by the painting of Carlotta in the museum, Madeleine's bouquet is the same as Carlotta's in the painting and her hair is worn in the same style. It seems as though her relation to the paintings, or the image in the painting causes Madeleine to enter into a form of unnatural participation, which leads her to attempt suicide by jumping into the river. Courtesy of reelsf.com/reelsf/vertigo



Of all the scandals of the history of art, none is so scandalous as the one that took place in 1913 in Paris at the premiere of Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring*. The music was as startling as the strange jerky movements of the choreography, causing an uproar in the audience of the bourgeois class. Courtesy of <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-22691267>

material. If we were to look at Deleuze and Guattari's model of the machinic assemblage in relation to the consumption of art, then it is essentially the interaction between the various components that make up the experience, and without each of these, the machinic assemblage becomes a different machinic assemblage, with new influential factors. For instance, say you see a sculpture at its original site in Egypt and then, a few years later, see the same sculpture in the British Museum; the sculpture may be the same, but the two experiences of seeing the sculpture are very different. Many things come into play here, the object itself, the history behind the object, the location that it is currently in versus its original home, and your conscious knowledge of what is behind what you are looking at. Perhaps you are excited to have this object be placed within the Western narrative of Egyptian history, or perhaps you feel that you are experiencing the result of a kidnapping. Another example; take the experience of seeing a painting in real life versus seeing an image of the painting in a book. Regardless of it being the same image, dreamed up and created by the same artist, representing the same time period, most of the time, one would typically assume that seeing the work in real life is a more enriching experience. The texture of the brush strokes, the size of the canvas, the acute silence and precise lighting of the museum, the singularity of the object, realizing that the object before you is not reproducible, are all live components which are absent when seeing a picture of the painting in a book. Reproductions of artworks in books can, however, also present interesting experiences of course, depending on the various components surrounding that particular image at the particular time you are seeing it. In the machinic assemblage, the work is not the sculpture that you are looking at, the work is the experience generated by you and the rest of the varying components that make up that specific experience, that specific event. It is important to reiterate that with every change that breaks the continuity of the active machinic assemblage, a new one immediately begins.

I have touched briefly on the machinic assemblages that are generated by the interaction between the consumer and the work of art, but it is not only the consumer who benefits from the art experience in this way. Of course, there are also the machinic assemblages that happen between the artist and the artwork during the various stages, from concept to production to exhibition. Every machinic assemblage creates a becoming which is contagious and involuntary. Being swept up in a becoming can take hold of any consumer of a work of art in varying degrees depending on the other contributing factors, however it does differ significantly from the becoming of the artist, the creator, the one that imbues the work with its initial form of life. I reflect back on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the writer: "if the writer is a sorcerer, it is because writing is a becoming, writing is traversed by strange becomings-insect, becomings-wolf, etc. Many suicides by writers are explained by these unnatural participations, these unnatural nuptials." [Deleuze &

Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining's* character, writer Jack Torrance, whose sanity becomes compromised initially through the process of writing. Courtesy of Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.



Guattari, 141] They mention Virginia Woolf, who “experiences herself as a troop of monkeys, a school of fish, according to her variable relations of becoming with the people she approaches”[Deleuze & Guattari, 139] In order for Virginia Woolf or any other writer or artist to become through production, in order for the viewer to become through consumption, there must first be an act of deterritorialization, a severance of oneself from their native values, ethics, prejudices and practices, in order to make room for whatever new thing is created during the block of becoming. “There are only multiplicities of multiplicities forming a single assemblage, operating in the same assemblage: packs as masses and masses as packs...how could lines of deterritorialization be assignable outside of circuits of territoriality? Where else but in wide expanses, and in major upheavals in those expanses, could a tiny rivulet of new intensity suddenly start to flow? What do you not have to do in order to produce a new sound?”[Deleuze & Guattari, 3] The aim of art has always been that of deterritorialization either by the revival of our perception of form, or by a liberation of form, or even both simultaneously. When a painter represents a bird, it is not only a deterritorialization of the bird and the paint, but also a deterritorialization of the artist, as they need to suspend the idea of this bird as a living thing with functioning organs, and take up the idea of this bird as a series of forms and colors of which he must copy to the canvas using tools and the same colors. When a viewer sees a painting of a bird and says “what a beautiful bird”, of course what they are really looking at is a series of forms of colors that have been put in place precisely enough to represent a living creature endowed with functioning organs. In this case, although the viewer/consumer understands, based on their preconceived knowledge, that this is really just paint on canvas, the viewer becomes deterritorialized, suspending what they know in reality in order to open up room to believe, in order to manipulate reality and see things differently, even for just a moment. When one becomes deterritorialized, when one is suspended in a becoming between the established values of their origin and whatever values will be reconstituted / affected by the block of becoming after, there is no history. Any real block of becoming is an anti-memory with also no distinct vision of the future.

The contingent event is a concept developed by Elie Ayache in his essay *In the Middle of the Middle of the Event*, which addresses the processes of working with, and/or modeling of, the unpredictable. “On the ‘metaphysical framework’, in order to model the unpredictable, first of all you have to identify the different scenarios that may take place...to me, it seems more natural to define it by the impact, rather than in terms of probability”[Ayache, 4] Ayache states that probability is self-defeating, and that it is more relevant to gauge the impact of the event after it takes place, as it would provide a better definition of what actually happened than any prior prediction you could have assigned to it anyway. He uses the example of

The Fable of Pygmalion and Galatea, Pygmalion being the gifted sculptor who resolves from women to devote life to his passion, sculpting, only to fall in love with a beautiful sculpture of a woman. Courtesy of genius.com/Ovid-the-metamorphoses-of-ovid-book-x-fable-7-annotated



the unexpected bestseller *The Black Swan*, whose author Nassim Nicholas Taleb did not expect to sell two and a half million copies of. He asserts that with unexpected circumstances like the sudden fame of Taleb “we are really dealing with a contingent event, a pure contingent event of such a kind that, beforehand, we don’t know what it’s going to look like.”[Ayache, 4] Inspired by the story of *The Black Swan*, Ayache wrote and released *The Blank Swan: The End of Probability*, a book in which he questions what takes place beyond probability, beyond the methods of planning and prediction that the moderns have developed in order to again avoid, escape or control any unknown realms. When suspending the need for prediction and control, the event becomes the creator of its own causes, but it’s only after the event that you know the causes, the contributors that made the event what it became. In this sense, the event is a ‘backward narrative’ requiring participants to adopt a new type of movement into the future, because instead of going in ready with a sure plan on what you believe will happen, it is now necessary to go in without expectation; only afterwards can you go back in time and trace out the chain of reasons that has led to its effects or affects. “It’s something where the writer can really throw himself into a process of writing, blindly so to speak, and one of my favorite expressions is that he is then ‘traversed by contingency,’ so he almost surprises himself with what he is writing...I think that the true spark of writing comes when you find yourself surprised by what you have written; and I would even claim that there are thoughts that you can only have through the material process of writing.”[Ayache, 7] Slavoj Zizek continues with the concept of the event in his book *Philosophy in Transit*, asking “does everything that exists have to be grounded in sufficient reason? Or can there be things that somehow happen out of nowhere?”[Zizek, 4] The event has no ontologically fixed point. Unlike all the rest of societies structured or well-founded entities, the event belongs to no pre-existent set. If the terms of Modernity depend on things existing as moral entities, then where does the event fit in? “Is an event a change in the way reality appears to us, or is it a shattering transformation of reality itself?”[Zizek 3] If an event is actually another word for becoming, and becoming effects all of the components of itself to varying degrees, leaving no participant unchanged, then the answer is #2, an event is a shattering transformation of reality itself. Every becoming is a contingent event of deterritorialization that transforms the reality of its parts, and the decolonization of thought requires this deterritorialization.