

МИСЛИ!

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Прошири

ја

сегашноста,

отпочни

ја

иднината

THINK!

THINK!

THINK!

Expanding

the

present,

launching

the

future

Уредници: Јане Чаловски

и Христина Иваноска

press to exit project space

book two

Page 21: Fatos Ustek

MAZE

I have always been fond of multiple choice crime novels, where the narrative is broken into parts for the reader's active involvement. That is to say, while you are reading a story on a burglary you come across a note: 'if you think the cook is the thief then jump to page 64'; and you are asked to continue reading from that assigned page; but if you think the gardener has committed the crime you are asked to continue reading from page 47. I have never been good at this. I could never follow the instructions because I was always so curious about the other possibilities; hence I would read the whole book which would make no sense in the end since the narrative would be overly fragmented and repetitive. And then I would force myself to decide on one of the options and try to go from there and finish the book. But that has never been the case.

In this text I will be introducing several arguments around the tricotomy of artist, curator and critic while visiting other positions and roles in the domain of visual cultures. While I am asking you to follow my line of thought I would like to provide you with a sense of freedom through marking jumps for the cases of agreement and disagreement, interest and indifference, curiosity and disengagement.

Here we begin.

If you are involved in the art scene please start with section A, if you are a follower of the arts please go to section B.

Section A:

I have been meandering through the new vocabulary that is in immense use in the arts: the new vocabulary, hence the new positions that are resembled by those terms. Today we are engaged in a composition of social roles in the course of the arts. It is not unusual to attend an exhibition curated by artists, nor receive an invitation to a gallery exhibition put together by a curator, nor hear a speech by an established institution director praising alternative structures and a parasitic nature of arts. All these examples are among many that do not surprise us anymore. Maybe surprise is the wrong wording to use in any case. The issue of this text is not to condemn any practice that is beyond its entitled position but to discuss the condition of new terminologies and their current productivity. The trichotomy of artist-curator-critic is expanding its margins where additional vocabularies add up to the dictionaries of visual arts, such as art dealer-curator, artist-writer, curator-critic, artist-curator, gallerist-critic... Hence, several combinations are leading towards a variety of positions. Let us investigate the nature of this variety. Is it a multitude that Negri&Hardt depict in their milestone book *Empire*? Or is it an alternative methodology of branding arts for its market value?

Section B:

Each day a new vocabulary, a new perspective is piling up in our dictionary of visual cultures. It is enriching to see the increase of art events, museums, biennials, publications; or the recent discursive investigations on curatorial, artistic, authorial knowledge; or the expanding education field for curators, artists and critics. Visual culture is establishing its factory of mass production. Besides the recent economic crisis, overproduction spans the artistic environment, thus the social and public. Critics like Hanno Rauterberg inform us of an uneasiness on the expanded space of arts with these words: 'Today this role (the role of the critic) as developmental aide and frontrunner has been abandoned. Present-day art no longer needs these persuaders. Everything as well as its opposite is possible, the great ideological debates have peacefully passed away, and the great battles of aesthetics have been fought. Today art is everywhere. Never was it more current, never so omnipresent. Whether on the Zugspitze (the highest mountain in Germany) or in the underground parking zone near Siemens in Munich, exhibitions and project presentations are everywhere and nobody can

escape from art any longer.’¹

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From one way or another we are facing a significant fact: overgrowth.

The field of arts is now a well-functioning industry with its growing economy and financial significance in macro politics. We can call it an industry: it is composed of museums, large-scale institutions but also schools and academies, printing and publishing houses, as well as fairs and festivals. Each sector is displaying growth in its own terms, for instance the number of curating courses and research degrees are increasing every year, new museums are being founded in various cities in the world, numerous awards and residencies are emerging for young and exciting artists ... In parallel to the opening of new venues, schools, fairs, biennials, independent spaces, the sphere of interplay accelerates. Institutions invite artists to curate shows, galleries commission curators for attractive exhibitions, writers are asked to compile events, publishers provide more opportunities to artists to publish artist books.

For statistical validation please continue to read, if uninterested
please jump to ‘**’

Thomas W. Eller in his text *Criticism in a Specialized Public Service Industry* informs us about the statistics in Germany: ‘In a 1999 study of the employment market for artists and publicists, the Social Science Research Center Berlin has traced this development and examined whether models for future working world realities could be divined from it. The good news to be gleaned from the study is this: art is a growth industry. In Germany, ca. 240,000 people were employed in 1995 in the broad cultural sector. The prognosis is that the number will almost double to 433,000 persons by 2010. This means that today already 1.3% of the labour force is employed in this sector, producing an estimated 4% of the gross national product. Between 1978 and 1995, the number of visual artists alone climbed by 118%. In the year 2002 there were officially 46,161 artists registered with the artists’ health insurance plan, the Kunstlersozialkasse, making up

1 Hanno Rauterberg, *Critic’s Turn The crisis of criticism – and how to avoid it*, Be Magazine, Issue #11, Kuenstlerhaus Bethanien Publications, 2004, p. 8

38.25% of all those working in the creative fields registered there. According to the Federal Association of German Galleries, the revenues of the artists they represent increased by 6 to 10% annually between 1996 and 1998. These are rates of increase which one can dream about in their venues in Germany.²

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In this beautiful picture something is challenging. In other words, the interplay is not a naïve one but a play of power and introducing influence over the masses (the audience). Before we start to elaborate on who this audience is, I would like to turn your attention to what is really happening in this picture. As a curator and critic, I do enjoy visiting exhibitions curated by artists or various art events with a different nature than I am used to. The phases of production grasp my interest and that is where I would like to take you.

Besides the excitement that comes from new influences and new approaches towards notions of display and making things public, the formulation of attitude stays within the existing anthology. That is to say, although we are floating over the positions and exchanging stances, the way it is realised is mostly taken as wearing the dresses of the other. Mostly, also in the line of commissions, when an artist is curating a show, he or she tries to become like the curator he has idealised and follows the imaginary steps of that curator. Hence the interplay does not expand the horizons of curating, nor exhibition making, but stays within its territories. Another example of staying within the territories is the institutionalisation of the curator for the sake of being able to make things public on a larger scale. Hence we approximate towards the genre of cinema where we are surrounded by blockbuster exhibitions, and/or exhibitions that want to be like them. And the responsibility of this is not singular. We are all in it and we are all part of the current situation.

Interruption.

Quoting Boris Groys: 'At least since the 1960s, artists have created installations in order to demonstrate their personal practices of selection. These installations, however, have been nothing other than exhibitions curated by artists, in

2 Thomas W. Eller, *Criticism in a Specialized Public Service Industry*, Be Magazine, Issue #11, Kuenstlerhaus Bethanien Publications, 2004, p. 26

which objects by others may be – and are – represented, as well as objects by the artist. [...] In short, once the identification between creation and selection has been established, the roles of the artist and of the curator also became identical. A distinction between the (curated) exhibition and the (artistic) installation is still commonly made, but it is essentially obsolete.³

The Encounter.

The picture I am drawing now is not an overly pessimistic one unless we restart to value the course of encounter with the arts. Under the rain of events, projects, exhibitions, openings, biennials, festivals, fairs, conferences, it seems to me that we have given up our excitement about art. We are following the methodology of colonialism through mapping, charting and categorizing everything we see, which we see in a snapshot. Under the heavy rain, we are running out of time; there is always another exhibition to see, a conference to attend, a party to mingle at. The encounters in timelessness span the experience of art. Additionally, due to immense textual explanations embedded in the spaces of exhibitions, there is a lesser need to see what is to be seen. In other words, with the help of each explanatory text, as the audience we are introduced to what we are seeing, what the set of references are and why the piece is important, challenging, spectacular, striving and sexy.

An encounter for the curious reader.

Irit Rogoff stresses the potentiality of looking away⁴ from art onto its audience. In a recent talk at The Showroom in London, Rogoff also expressed her interest in the unhappy audience: the audience that turns away from art and participates in the space of the spectator as the spectator of art. This moment was a crucial moment to think upon the notion of happiness while questioning the possible reasoning of asking for unhappiness in the encounter. What draws me into art is the resonance that sparkles with the encounter and that lasts in an undefined period of time. Let it be a minute or an hour or some years or a lifetime. I might sound overly romantic about my ideas on art but let me be so. For

3 Claire Bishop, 'What is a Curator?', *Be Magazine*, issue #15, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 2008, p. 121

4 Looking Away: Participations in Visual Culture. In: *After Criticism—New Responses to Art and Performance*. Blackwell Publishing, 2004

me a happy audience is not the one who only leaves the space of arts joyously, but also the one who experiences an engagement through feeling, thinking, questioning, which leads him or her to an urge to share.

The Partners in Crime.

Following the fault lines in this picture, let us talk about some factuality: economy, relations, interest and benefits.

Artists are continuously being asked to activate the spaces of encounter and so mostly create a site-located work with an interactive nature. Curators and critics are demanded to produce texts that are more of a translation than an articulation for the sake of reaching a wider public. (But where is this massive body of public? Whom are we reaching actually?) Institutions expect from their curators to continuously produce opulent volumes of exhibition catalogues that will praise the name of the institution through displaying its financial strength, its visionary choice and its wide umbrella with visual and conceptual density. Large-scale exhibitions mostly appear as a gathering of images around a meta-narrative or a grandiose idea that the exhibition is structured upon. Institutions race towards becoming the most prestigious spaces for showing art. Art fairs compete to gather significant (powerful) galleries on their premises. Countries (with strong economical power) start up new funding possibilities to support their fellow artists' continuity of production. Art schools introduce postgraduate studies to further intellectual engagement. Corporate companies support festivals, biennials in order to strengthen their patronage.

Interruption.

'In their 1989 essay "From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur", the French sociologists Nathalie Heinrich and Michael Pollak argue that within the space of a generation, the role of the curator has changed from a depersonalised profession, oriented around the fourfold task of 'safeguarding the heritage, enriching collections, research and display', to a position of singularity in one area in particular: the presentation of works to the public. In their eyes, this change took place as a result of a rise in the number of exhibitions in museums (both permanent displays and temporary shows), a diversification of disciplines that can be exhibited (from natural history museums to commercial art fairs), and the growth of exhibitions by cultural institutions (monographic, thematic,

geographical, historical, etc). The latter in particular requires new functions, which they describe as ‘an enlarged administrative role, determining a conceptual framework, selecting specialised collaborators from various disciplines, directing work crews, consulting with an architect, assuming a formal position in terms of presentation, organising the publishing of an encyclopaedic catalogue, etc.’ It is significant that all of these roles are also a question of competition and market-ing: there are more exhibitions because there are more venues for contemporary art, which in turn play an important role in the regeneration of cities through tourism; accordingly, the role of the curator is increasingly promotional.⁵

Artist Facilitates + Curator as Auteur → Critic in Schizophrenia.

Be Magazine’s thematic part in the 15th issue intends to perpetuate their tradition of activating current debates on and around art and pays a visit to the curator as auteur. The editors announce their polemical tone of questioning this dying friend as: ‘It asks what is left of the heritage of art’s historical free thinkers in this global system, which function as neatly and fluently as the assembly line in the Transparent Manufacture.’⁶ Auteur director draws a metaphor between the parallel industries of film and art. ‘In doing so, it asks what has become of the auteurs of curating who would be able to bring about a breach in the shallow consensus that prevails among the protagonists between Gwangju and Berlin.’⁷

Additional.

‘The auteur theory arose in film discourse in the 1950s out of the frustration felt by an emerging generation of critics and filmmakers at the lack of recognition granted to directors who worked in the big studios, personified by stars and over-seen by name-above-the-title moguls. Under this system studio heads held all the cards, actors were the glamorous ‘talent’ and directors were moved from project to project at the whim of managers and were sent packing when they pushed their own vision too hard. All in all, it was an assembly line from which the ‘art of cinema’ issued like brand-name goods of collective or anonymous design.

5 Claire Bishop, ‘What is a Curator?’, Be Magazine, issue #15, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 2008, P 131 – 132

6 Editorial, Be Magazine, issue 15, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 2008

7 Patrick Boris Kremer, The Auteur. Preface and Obituary, Be Magazine, issue 15, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 2008

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With this parallel in mind, it is unsurprising that many curators feel disgruntled. (The fact that most are also underpaid while being obliged to witness orgies of spending doesn't help morale.) Correspondingly, the thought that advocates might rescue their reputations from oblivion like those of Sam Fuller, Ida Lupino, Douglas Sirk and William Wyler is understandably appealing. In the fullness of time scholars may yet argue the case on behalf of a handful of those now crowding the curatorial ranks. By general agreement the late Harald Szeeman has probably attained auteur status already. Applying a metaphysical aestheticism, an agile craftsman's ingenuity and cheerful political shrewdness to making exhibitions that covered a staggering range of work over a period of nearly 50 years, his achievement was palpably shaped by a sensibility that transcends the contingencies and occasional opportunism that otherwise inflected it.⁸

► Further reading recommendation: http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/reading_circle/

The crisis in criticism has long been announced. In 1963 Albrecht Febri, and in 1977 Mieczyslaw Porebski denounced their uneasiness about the ongoing production of critics and their position in the society (of arts). In the year 2000 Maurice Berger published the book *The Crisis of Criticism* where he brought together a delicate study of the currency. Criticism emerged as an agent of modernism introducing the avant-garde, according to Hanno Rauterberg, and needs a core of credibility that is self-reflexive without being self-referential. In the condition where curators are positioned as the guardians of the 'new', there emerges the schizophrenia of the critic: the critics' fear of criticism.

Unlike curators or artists, critics are asked to obey a certain set of rules in order to fulfil their role. Hence the critic shall, at all times, develop criteria, and argue on it logically with the categorical self-isolation of a guild of critics.

Over production On a deserted land Of criticality.

Receiving e-flux mailings are beneficial not only to get to know what is happening in established institutions, but also to catch up with the latest styles of

press release writing. All texts are different from each other on a very fine line. An installation artist's work might also be the work of a performance artist on the very basis that their issues are alike and the way their works are described resemble each other. The language of guiding the audience into the works is so similar that we can almost talk about a new tradition in creative writing: copy & paste.

I actually do not want to be so harsh on the recent press releases. My consideration stems from their unconnected nature with the works. We no longer look at the work, we read the text that accompanies it, we hear the curator or director talking about it, we read the critic's descriptive review on it. Moreover, main-stream media function as disseminators and documenters of exhibition calendars, thus as chronicles of the art industry that they are 'the' trend announcers, statement issuers and audience attractors; hence the critics work for them shall fall in line of their stance.

If you think the future is of the artists please stop reading the text and visit an exhibition immediately.

If you think the future is of the curators please purchase the recently published book A brief history of Curating by Hans Ulrich Obrist. Reviews say it is very enjoyable to read.

If none of the above, or you do not have a choice, please continue reading.

When we try to make a broad definition of the last half decade and the changes that were introduced throughout, we can say that the 70s have been marked with installation art which also influenced independent curating, the 90s have been the era of the curator as the gatekeeper of the 'new and exciting', the 2000s are marked with various institutional approaches into the domain of the arts. Where do we go from here? In the midst of overgrowth, artists, curators and critics with a stance are asking for a criticality. We, as cultural producers, are praising the criticality and the significance of having a critical stance. The near future is in need of elaborate articulations, independent perspectives and the embodiment of productive togetherness.

Lastly, the future will be of the critic because of the shifting balance in authorial positions. The artists, through involvement in collective initiations, and the

curators, through theorizing the potentiality of cooperation, have moved away from having an authorial position on their own towards a shared (mostly negotiated) one. Today, the critic who has been distanced from the public and the artist scene holds the potential of introducing an authorial position. That is to say, in the 60s the critics were much closer to the public and they were the agencies of art through their involvement in the public discourse. The critic's embraced state of being in society shifted as they moved closer to the artist and started a flirt, though the artist was not as open as the public to host someone who is like a friend with a sharp pen. Hence a metamorphosis started; critics who wanted to stay closer to the artists produced pieces that were more in line with what their friends expected from them, and critics who wanted to go back to the societal space were left alone and thus started to grow a bitter feeling about writing on art. Although I have told you this story like a soap opera plot, please consider reading between the lines.

Thus, I personally believe that the future will be of the critic since he will be the one who renews the authorial positions. And it is not a singular happy story; we will all go along as far as we allow ourselves to invent new ways of producing and sharing, as far as we allow ourselves to step out of the narrowing circle of institutionalisation for the sake of sharing the growing cake of economy.

Conclusion:

Many of you might think that I cannot be a multiple-choice-crime-novel writer. You might have a point.