

**FREE AS AIR  
AND WATER**



# FREE AS AIR AND WATER

The School of Art at The Cooper Union

**Inaugural Exhibition at the 41 Cooper Gallery**

September 16 through October 27, 2009

## **ARTISTS**

ALLORA & CALZADILLA

AMY BALKIN

ROBERT BORDO

THE BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION

ROSS CISNEROS

AMY FRANCESCHINI AND FREE SOIL

ANDREA GEYER

HANS HAACKE

PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS

RUNO LAGOMARSINO

MARJETICA POTRC

ANDREA POLLI

SIMON STARLING

TEMPORARY SERVICES

OSCAR TUAZON

LIDWIEN VAN DE VEN

CURATORS: SASKIA BOS AND STEVEN LAM



## FIELDS OF DREAMS

Amy Franceschini and Free Soil's *Intentional Communities* consists of a reading station, a video and a large wall map that details the historical geography of the region from communes in the Santa Clara hills to the corporate parks of defense contractors in Silicon Valley. The artist group has researched the various "counter-institutional" learning collectives or "free universities" that occupied this area in the 1960s. The individuals in these collectives were often draft resisters, members of the anti-nuclear movement, and environmentalists who advocated for localized methods of learning and living. The viewer is invited to sit on a bench and peruse *The Free Soil Reader* which presents documentation, photographs, essays and historical ephemera from these collectives.

Between 1998 and 2008, the Chicago-based collective Temporary Services produced a collection of nearly 71 booklets, posters and publications offering solutions and poignant critiques to a variety of political and everyday problems such as piracy and urban foraging. For the exhibition, Temporary Services whose members include Brett Bloom, Salem Collo-Jullin and Marc Fischer, provided a set of these books and publications that add to the concerns raised in this exhibition.

*Field of Dreams* (2009), a portable installation by The Bruce High Quality Foundation consists of two blackboards with video that unpack the public dreams of promotional speech and its consequences for private citizens. In the project, the attempt toward "sustainable pedagogical infrastructures" is re-imagined as a dialectic between what we say and what we do. References to the inventor of "social sculpture" Joseph Beuys are evident in the use of chalk and blackboard. But irony prevails: the smaller and the larger blackboard clearly allude to a master-pupil relationship especially prevalent in Germany's typical Meisterklasse.

## SPEECH ACTS

Paul Ramirez Jonas mounted *Paper Moon*, an installation consisting of 475 sheets of office paper tiled onto a large wall. Repeatedly printed on the sheets is the phrase, "I Create When I Speak." Collectively viewed, the phrases constitute the image of the moon. However, upon closer inspection, the phrase appears disjointed and fragmented. By extracting a single page that is placed on a reading stand, the artist invites the viewer to perform this speech act (aloud or in silence), poetically referencing how human agency and empowerment are tied to our conception of the world.

For the video *Freedom of Expression*, Lidwien Van de Ven shot footage of a press conference in the European Union complex in Brussels. This video focuses on the political figure Ayaan Hirsi Ali who presents her case for E.U. protection against threats to her life. The work subtly exposes the contradictions and controversy associated with this

particular request as Hirsi Ali and her associates argue for the right to critique Islam as a political freedom. The film is meticulously edited with footage of Hirsi Ali surrounded by officials. Sitting in the press conference, the former parliamentarian is portrayed as an isolated, silent figure without agency. By situating the viewer in this media event, the artist reveals the inherent paradox implicit within this case.

In his essay “Atmospheric Politics,” the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk reminds his readers that political representation has a spatial origin. Provocatively asserting that an atmospheric premise for liberty can provide an alternative narrative to issues of democracy, Sloterdijk argues that the public sphere, political participation and consensus are not merely the result of individuals coming together and forming an assembly. While legal and sociological theorists often utilize courthouses and town halls to visualize the body politic, Sloterdijk, instead, borrows from biological and naturalist terminology such as the greenhouse to formulate a political theory based on environmental principles. For him, an environment encircles subjects enabling entities to coexist within a shared space. Utilizing the metaphor of a greenhouse—which are often artificial habitats that provide life support for diverse plant species—Sloterdijk argues that an environment like this one allows for strangers and persons “to come together in one place and naturalize in a shared climate.” To condition air is to control one’s climate, and to share that climate with others is a socio-political act. *Free as Air and Water* followed this impulse to encode the political with the environmental. By doing so, freedom of speech perhaps does not reside in the power of having a voice. It resides in the ability to take a seat and listen, to coexist and wait for others to speak, to share the stage, ground, soil and air with others. As Sloterdijk suggests, “it is not communication or the freedom of speech as such that make democracy possible, but the ability of the agents to prevent themselves mutually from acting out unilateral pretensions.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Sloterdijk, Peter  
“Atmospheric Politics.”  
*Making Things Public: Atmospheres  
of Democracy*, eds.  
Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel  
(Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 950.





Paul Ramirez Jonas, *Paper Moon*, 2008



# FREE AS AIR AND WATER

## SYMPOSIUM AT THE COOPER UNION

The exhibition, *Free As Air and Water* generated a series of lectures. The first symposium, held in The Great Hall, *Artistic Responses to Self-Sustainability and Climate Change* featured presentations by artists Marjetica Potrč, Andrea Polli, Hans Haacke, Amy Balkin and art historian, critic Yates McKee. The second symposium, *Art in Relation to Human Rights and the Freedom of Expression* included a conversation between The Bruce High Quality Foundation, Andrea Geyer and Paul Ramirez Jonas. These lectures, both moderated by School of Art Faculty member Doug Ashford, are presented as edited transcriptions in the following pages. The printed presentations of these lectures serve to highlight the nuances of the arguments, preserving these presentations for future research.



SYMPOSIUM 2  
ART IN RELATION  
TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND  
AND THE FREEDOM  
OF EXPRESSION

PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS  
THE BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION  
ANDREA GEYER  
DOUG ASHFORD

OCTOBER 12, 2009  
THE FREDERICK P. ROSE AUDITORIUM  
41 COOPER SQUARE  
NEW YORK CITY

Paul Ramirez Jonas  
*Broadside*, 2007

A portable lectern serves as a pedestal for an oath typed on a tablet of unfired clay. Should you choose to use the microphone, the lectern can also amplify and broadcast your voice. Oaths are another form of a score; the one presented is ready to be performed by the audience. Does the oath's power come into effect only when it is read out loud and repeated word for word? Or is a silent reading enough?



the 20th century is merely one point in the spiral. Another point is the privatization of energy and communication services at the turn of the century, and perhaps one can argue the next stop is the current economic crisis. What interests us in this analogy is not the inevitable disempowerment or anguish that follow these activities. We are interested in imagining the possible exits both conceptually, politically and artistically at each notch of this spiral. Referencing the French political philosopher whose writings helped enthuse the French Revolution, Hardt and Negri wrote 'Rousseau said that the first person who wanted a piece of nature as his or her own exclusive possession and transformed it into the transcendent form of private property was the one who invented evil. Good, on the contrary, is what is common.' Thank you, and I would like to now hand the microphone to Paul.

**PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS:** I would like to take ten minutes to show a few projects that I culled for tonight's conversation. I've always believed, with post-modern passion, that the reader is more creative than the writer. Everything I made has been predicated on the idea in which I would begin with a pre-existing text that I would somehow perform. In the last five years, I came to realize that I'm more of a reader than an author, and therefore I have a commonality with the people who read my work. Aren't we all just readers together? That realization has made the work turn itself inside out. I'm now simply presenting, as in this lecture, *for others*, rather than for myself. I no longer perform the work, as much as make it available for the viewer to perform.



This is a work called *Broadside* and it uses a very dorky institutional public address system (page 75). The PA system folds into a little suitcase that you can travel with, open up and be ready to give a speech. The top of the suitcase becomes a speaker. The bottom half becomes the lectern, and within it I present a text to be read out loud. Viewers come up to it and can see that it is turned on. The texts that I lay in it consist of oaths that are typed into clay, and allowed to dry in the sun—making a reference to the beginning of writing: cuneiform written in clay. The oaths state things such as: “I solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.”

Performative speech is one that only comes into effect while performed. It needs to be uttered, not simply read. It’s similar to how a musical score is not really music until someone performs it. I like the idea of what happens when a text/score is read out loud. But I am also interested in what happens when the oath is read silently, does it have any power?

I’ve done a number of projects that incorporate the use of keys. I created *Talisman* for the 28th Sao Paulo Biennial in 2008, which took place in the Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavillion, a gem of modernist architecture. The inside of the building has a distinctive ramp that takes the viewer between the floors. I stationed a kiosk at the base of it. In this kiosk, participants can come and exchange one of their own keys for a key to the front door of the exhibition space. To begin with, people would approach and line up in front of the kiosk. The members of the public would then give a key from their key chain to the attendant. The attendant would make a copy to keep, and in exchange, cut a key of the front door of the pavilion to give the viewer. In addition, one had to sign a contract. The oversized contract indicated that participants who went to the museum after hours, with their very own key, would behave as if they were in the museum during regular hours. They would conduct themselves according to the same norms that they would follow if guards and other people were present. At the end of the show, this contract signed by 5,000 members of the public, the artist, the two curators, and the president of the biennial foundation, and translated in three languages, became the final manifestation of the piece.

Another piece where you have to give a little something to get something back was the penny crushing machine titled *We Make Change* (page 85). In this situation, people inserted pennies into the sculpture, cranked the handle, and the machinery within the sculpture edited and re-engraved the penny. It erased most of the information contained on the penny and simply left an edited version of “In God We Trust.” Instead it wrote: “Trust Me” or, “Trust We,” depending on the orientation one reads the resulting penny. Somewhere between “Trust Me,” and “Trust We,” is where citizenship lies.



Paul Ramirez Jonas  
*Tinterillo, Yo Creo Como Hablo*, 2008

This situation took place in Cali, Colombia in front of an art space called Lugar a Dudas (the place of doubt). The artist hired Diego Torres, a tinterillo by trade, to be available free of charge to the public. A tinterillo is a street scribe that provides literacy for the illiterate. In this situation the public can sit down and anonymously dictate a memory to Mr. Torres. There are no pre-conditions, but the available papers are a type of form that gently invites memory. Thus, voice becomes text, text occupies pages, and at the end the pages are bound into a storybook.

Paul Ramirez Jonas  
*Talisman*, 2008

*Tinterillo* is a piece I made in Cali, Colombia. A tinterillo is a public scribe often stationed in parks. If someone who cannot read or write needs to fill out a bank form, government form or send a letter, they go to the public scribe. Love letters or personal letters are rare; most people use the scribes for bureaucratic everyday needs. The scribes stock every possible form that one might need in daily life. One pays them and dictates information to the scribes who fill out the forms. You have verbal language and they have written language—one pays for this service.

I hired a scribe and paid his salary for three weeks. I made some forms of my own for the public to pick from and fill out. All the forms referred to memory of some kind. Pretend you picked this particular form that states: “I don’t remember when.” If that’s the form you picked, you could dictate something that you do not quite remember. In another example, someone is remembering a terrible accident involving her child. Other forms had the heading, “Once upon a time,” others forms said, “A couple months ago,” “before the war,” “in my grandparents time,” “many years ago.” They all refer to relative time. It was never absolute time such as a date: “1984.” The forms always appealed to a subjective idea of time and memory, such as: “I will never forget” or “tomorrow.” At the end of the project, all the stories were scanned and printed into a small history book that will go into a library in Cali. I should add that in Spanish, there is no difference between the word “story” and “history.” In Spanish the word storybook has a double meaning, it also means history book.

Another project that involved keys took place in the city of Cambridge. Believe it or not, this traffic island was called *Taylor Square*. I was asked to make a permanent public artwork for the city and in response I turned that traffic island into a fairly banal New England commons. It’s actually part of the park system now, and it is very proudly billed as the smallest



park in Cambridge. It has everything a New England commons should have—a green area to congregate, a bench to reflect, a flagpole to pay homage to our country, and it has two iron gates. The gates are made in a very specific way. They're always locked from the outside and open from the inside. So, if you want to gain access, you just have to reach over and open the door. I spent the bulk of the budget making 5,000 keys. One side of the key says, "Taylor Square," and the other side says "Copy Me." The keys were mailed to 5,000 households around the park with the following letter:

*Here is your key. It is one of 5,000 keys that opens Taylor Square, Cambridge's newest park. The park and the keys are a work of public art that I made for you. The park has barely enough room for a bench and a flagpole; please accept this key as its monument. Add it to your key chain along with the keys that open your home, vehicle or workplace. You now have a key to a space that has always been yours. Copy it and give it away to neighbors, friends and visitors. Your sharing will keep the park truly open. Taylor Square Park is at the intersection of Sherman, Garden Street and Huron Avenue.*

About three days ago, I decided that this was a work of art (page 85, *Moon Penny*). All artworks are essentially collaborative. Duchamp said, "art is a game among artist of all ages." He was right, but the game includes more than artists—there is the friend who gave you the idea, the assistant, the fabricator, the donor—all work is a collaboration. And I always feel that there's no way to give thanks, properly, no way to pay back all those who have worked with you. I decided then to make a coin that represents a different kind of currency. When someone has been particularly helpful, I pay them with this coin that has an image of the moon on its face. On the other side of the coin is the dark side of the moon.

I'll finish my presentation with an image of this monument (page 89). It is a fairly typical equestrian statue, the kind that always takes center stage in public spaces. These type of monuments are always made of permanent materials, and because of the nature of the material, it can only be inscribed once. The state marks public space with that one permanent inscription. I like to fantasize what would happen if this monument was made out of cork, transforming it into a bulletin board. In this way we could inscribe public space over and over.

**THE BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION:** Something's got to give. The \$200,000-debt-model of art education is simply untenable. Furthermore, the education artists are getting for their money is mired in irrelevance, pushing them into critical redundancy on the one hand, and professional mediocrity on the other. Blind romanticism and blind professionalism are in a false war alienating artists from their better histories.

**DOUG ASHFORD:** I want to start with the idea of a non-artistic experience: the adoption of forms from everyday life. It occurs to me that in the work of Ramirez-Jonas and BHQF there's a suggested idea of extending the meaning of the work outside of the art context and that such a relocation could make new aesthetic experiences possible. Paul's work seems, in both setting and geography, highly dependent on the art context—biennials, museums and so forth—to create ironies around consumption and dispersal. And for BHQF the actual production seems dependent on the art setting in relation to sponsorship and collecting. I'm wondering if both of you could comment on how the work might exist outside of its present conditions for distribution?

Andrea Geyer  
*Time Present*, 2009  
Detail  
Digital C-Print, engraved glass,  
aluminum frame

The Bruce High Quality Foundation  
Document of BHQFU, 2009

**PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS:** I'm not interested in pushing my work so far that it leaves the frame of art. I'm interested, like you are, Andrea, in the collective that is created around an artwork. It's not my idea, in which artworks create a public that come together through free association, that is spontaneous and not dictated by the state, or by membership to something compulsory. They are artworks and you consciously see them as artworks, and thus, they connect you to other viewers of art—in a free way. This is a very small thing that art can do, but I think it's maybe the most important thing art can do.

**THE BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION:** I guess, obviously you need means to do things, like run a school. Our school is really important to us. It stems from The Cooper Union—that education is free. This reality of debt seems so crushing for people who get out of school. And they have this situation that they'll be dealing with for the next 10 or 15 years. Having education be free is a basic tenet, and I think it's really something that can't be compromised. Then the question of how to fund those things becomes a kind of constant, political negotiation. And we've tried to build structures of funding from scratch. Everything that you do in a collaboration is intrinsically political, because there's all these human relationships at stake and so forth. We also fund the school out of the sales of our work. Which is another political reality that's extremely loaded.

**ANDREA GEYER:** But I think what's interesting, though, is that there are different generations and waves in creating schools like this. This raises numerous questions such as, why do we call this a school? Is there a rethinking of pedagogy involved, and if so, what would that be? If it's just a group of friends hanging out, why isn't it a club or a salon? That's the old fashioned way of calling it.

**DOUG ASHFORD:** We seem to love the image of education but never its reality. It is interesting that the complex history of autonomous schools and educational moments only make it into the art world as background

displays, or elite “relationalist art.” The actual thinking and labor of educators is perhaps still too much work for our institutions. But to get to the content issue again, what is your curriculum?

**THE BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION:** The first thing we did was that we started having a weekly meeting. It’s every Tuesday night at seven o’clock, and it’s open to anyone who is participating in the school. That meeting is our form of administration. We start with a small group of people. We start asking more people, they invite more people, and more and more and more people. The people that are leading classes are not considered faculty. They are not teachers. They are just people that are taking the responsibility to get there a few minutes early every week and to decide roughly how things should go. They’re facilitators. And then every Tuesday, anyone who’s in class can come back and if there are issues, those get worked out there. Things get worked out just through a discussion. The curriculum—I think six classes are running. They’re fairly broad. There’s a class on cult shenanigans from the 20th century/ 21st century which looks at utopian artist communities, as well as the occult, and how they’ve influenced each other and they’re actually doing thought experiments. There’s a music class that’s called, “Music in Space,” which is about doing music performance outdoors or in public spaces or in spaces that are not your typical music presentation scenario. There’s a “Philosophy of Cinema” class... I could rattle off the whole list.

**DOUG ASHFORD:** I’m interested in redirecting the possibility of inventing resources of exchange back to Paul. Can you speak about any ambivalence you might have in producing *Moon Penny* as *not* an artwork? The work is always “lost” when you give it to people as thanks for helping you. It appears only as a sacrificial event, or as celebration of a moment that insists on an economy outside of traditional exchange. Is the *Moon Penny* ever exhibited?

**PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS:** The *Moon Penny* is not for show. But I always ask myself this question: how many viewers are enough? What’s success for the BHQFU project? How many students does it take? Is a work successful because it has one viewer? Ten? One hundred? A thousand? I’m interested in the understanding how much is enough. It’s interesting that if an artwork is too private, it might not be considered an artwork. But if for example MoMA sold my moon penny in their gift shop, it would be seen by many more individuals, but it would also enter that zone where one doubts it would be considered an artwork. I don’t think of these coins as gifts, because I definitely received something in return.

**DOUG ASHFORD:** I’m interested in how Andrea feels about this.

**ANDREA GEYER:** I trust the ways artworks can actually address a political situation in a way that no other form can do, because it has the capacity





Paul Ramirez Jonas  
*New Currency*, 2008

It seems to me that most works of art are a form of collaboration. How does one pay one's invaluable helpers? I realized that I needed a kind of currency that would carry a value different than what I have in the bank. I minted this coin with an image of the two sides of the moon. I carry some with me and I use them to pay for things that are beyond value.

Paul Ramirez Jonas  
*We Make Change*, 2008

Materials: Penny press machine, oak, plexiglass, one from each year minted from 1909 to 2008, promise—Trust Me.  
Additional materials: pennies and the public.

of creating a discursive frame, for lack of a better word, in which certain questions or problems can be debated within. Fred Moten, who gave this beautiful lecture a few weeks back, (during the Interdisciplinary Seminar series, The Cooper Union, September 2009) made this interesting analogy, “every protest is an aesthetic intervention and every aesthetic intervention is a protest.” I believe in the power of that language and that kind of discourse which we create through artistic practices. I want to find ways in which an aesthetic intervention operates. How do we create these discursive moments through aesthetic interventions?

**PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS:** I have great belief in art, but oddly enough I have very little faith in human nature. Strange paradox. Going back to the idea of the school project, I'm interested in how one cannot simply consume the school. You cannot be a consumer of school. The only way you can see the school project work is through participation. You have to give something to get something out of this artwork. Likewise with my sculptures, you have to put a penny to get something out. However, I'm equally interested in apathy. I really respect Felix Gonzalez-Torres, I feel he opened a territory that is still there for other artists to pick up from. But it's always interesting to see how one walks out of a museum that is showing his work and one sees the Felix Gonzalez-Torres posters in the trashcan.

**DOUG ASHFORD:** That's interesting.



**THE BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION:** There's a weird cheapness to always taking free stuff and it not having a value, or it being really intrinsically disposable.

**DOUG ASHFORD:** The idea would be that at some point free stuff would interfere to such a degree that everything else would start to fall apart, right? And all the objects and all the questions would start to get opened up.

**PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS:** That's why I'm interested in the idea of membership. How can we make artworks where people are not just consuming the artwork? Because consumers, by definition, are always passive.

**SPEAKER A:** There are a couple words that are going around. There's the term, "school," but there is a school, a place where you learn about art. And there's also schools *of* art. Then, there's the idea of social sculpture. All these other ideas are aspects of pedagogy, don't you think?

**THE BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION:** What is exciting about the idea of trying to reclaim education is that it would be something ongoing in a person's life.

**PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS:** It's interesting to speculate that if we lived in a more normal industrialized society, where education would be free, calling your school free would have a completely different meaning. This other meaning is obscured by the fact that we live in a country where education is expensive. In this country, only the monetary aspect of the word, "free," has a resonance.

**DOUG ASHFORD:** Like the free class at the Berlin art school. This was established in the early 80's and was free not because it didn't cost money. It was free because it chose to exist outside the atelier, master-apprentice context of art education as it existed in Germany at that time. It was open-ended, based on panels, visiting artists, discursive formats outside of the institution. That's what freedom meant.

**PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS:** What would a free clinic mean? Nevermind. . .  
[LAUGHTER]

**DOUG ASHFORD:** It would mean anyone could be a doctor.

**ANDREA GEYER:** For me it's interesting that you're starting this particular school in a particular moment in the city. I'm wondering who needs free education now? What's the responsibility attached to a public project in that way? How does that tie into the current political situation, the current economic situation? Yes, there is a potential that you have a space where things can be taught outside of a certain set, institutional frame.

**THE BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION:** I think it definitely makes it more tenuous. You run the risk of it being explained via the current emergency, when everyone gets bowled over with happiness that all of these alternative practices are springing up. I think people have been doing that stuff all through the affluent Bush years. And now since there's talk that the market crashed, we can go back to the good old 60's and 70's alternative practices. That seems really dangerous to me. We didn't decide to start a school because the market crashed. We decided to start a school because education needed to happen. We needed a place to talk and we thought other people needed it too.

**DOUG ASHFORD:** So how do the symbolic acts we make as artists create lived effects in the social imaginations of the people who actually have to negotiate the official spaces of knowledge management? For instance, when we talk about the freedom of education we should remember that we live in a city that made "free" public education over 150 years ago in order to create a constant state of social normalization and economic disenfranchisement. It seems important to remember that the freedom we may find in our artistic context might come from a greater social loss.

**PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS:** What's interesting about the university is the idea of graduation. Take for example a student who is enrolled in university. What this individual learns for the next four years is a hundred percent of what they know. And then eight years later, that learning is fifty percent of what they know, and in sixteen years it's twenty-five percent of what they know. The further away you get from graduation, the thinner the knowledge accumulated in school becomes. You have to keep educating yourself for the rest of your life. And then one might come to the



realization: how come the first four years of your education cost so much and the rest was free? I find that's interesting about the BHQFU, the project throws a monkey wrench in the equation. When do people graduate anyway?

**THE BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION:** Oh, when people get really annoying, we graduate them.

**PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS:** It's frowned upon?

**THE BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION:** We don't encourage graduation.

**SPEAKER B:** Andrea, can you speak more about the distinction between discourse and practice? Are the two synthesized?

**ANDREA GEYER:** Thanks. I don't want to create a simple binary between these two things. I don't think they are so separated, but I can see that there's a tipping over towards discourse, around art and theory. There's an expectation to frame work in a very particular kind of language that has become fluent. What I resist is actually not the language, but the fluidity of a certain set of references that we are embracing, or are supposed to embrace. I would like to have an investment in the discourse that happens *between* artworks, or, *within* art. There's less opportunity for us as artists to set up shows, set up particular discourses we are interested in. There are so many parameters that make that really hard, we all know them. In our city, I experience a lack of realization in which group shows are not merely theme shows, but are actually in their own way a proposal, a proposition, by creating a dialogue between different art works. I feel that as artists, we have managed to maintain a discourse on the basis of language that we create for ourselves, privately and publicly, but we haven't managed to sustain a similar space for putting our work in dialogue with each other. Of course there are nowadays more and more artists invited by institutions to propose exhibitions, but that is still a very small group that is picked from the institution's side.

**SPEAKER B:** You also mentioned the emotion of politics, can you expand on that?

**ANDREA GEYER:** Often when one talks about art and politics, I feel that people talk about it as something that exists outside of a body; as if it exists abstractly, as a notion. We talk about globalization, we talk about Marxism, we talk about all kinds of ideas, as if they exist as mere concepts. I'm interested in these situations of complicated experiences—for example globalization, or global warming—and how the moment of their occurrence ties those experiences to a set of memories that we accumulated through education, through our own individual experiences, through our families which then become zipped together in this moment of an encounter.



Paul Ramirez Jonas

Unrealized project: an equestrian monument made of cork.

Materials: cork, multicolor push pins, in addition to paper and writing contributed by the public.

Text: various contributions from the public.

There are two voices that inscribe the public space. One of them is ours and it is ephemeral, improvised and temporal. The other voice is the state's and it tries to be permanent, and monumental. It is made of stone and bronze. Our material is cork, capable of accommodating us all -even if for a short time. In this monument, all we need is a scrap of paper, a pen, and a thumbtack to publish our voice.

**DOUG ASHFORD:** It's like trying to imagine the artwork as having an engendering presence. By this I mean art would beget a person; set up a relationship that could be as disruptive as an encounter with a person. Anyone who's been involved with direct political action knows that one needs more than empathy, but a deeply active inverse identification with the other. The presence of the other, a stranger even, demanding a rethinking of the self. Such a disruption produced by an aesthetic encounter may produce changes in political possibility. That task might be: how can a singular individual create a presence or disruption that we can understand collectively?

Going back to our discussion on art and discourse, I think numerous possibilities have been presented. The challenge is to get institutions that we work with as artists to go beyond the existing promotional context of the art world as it already exists. Even discourse like this has become so much a part of our media-genic, promotional artworld.

**SPEAKER C:** But do you think it is possible to have a social contract of emotions? And more importantly don't you think discourse has a viable and important role in shaping how we think and react in the public sphere?

**DOUG ASHFORD:** I'm not arguing against conversation itself. I'm trying to argue how our present moment values the currency of artists as interlocutors of themselves for the benefit of the market. I'm happy that we've become public intellectuals if the conversation we engender can overcome the simplistic branding and distribution of our work. Work



is now forced to have certain parameters that didn't before, because it's married to a discursive addendum that takes on currency and develops capital. And that, I think, goes against the idea of discourse that one might understand as "common." Going back to Steven's introduction, Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's insistence that "language is the common," is a call to preserve criticality as a conversation that is autonomous and has effect.

**ANDREA GEYER:** I'm glad that Doug tried to clarify that, because I'm talking about a certain kind of discourse—art discourse. I recently engaged in a larger conversation in which Mary Kelly was involved along with other artists from different generations. She made a very interesting triangulation: there is community, which is a physical support, then there is discourse, which are the rules, and then there's art, which is the medium. I really find that way of thinking very engaging. I could see its manifestation in all three generations. And it's also interesting for me to then recognize that they don't exist without each other, you know? Somehow, within the kind of practice that I engage in, you need these three points.

**PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS:** I consider myself someone who is creating discourse *by* creating artworks, and it's very fluid. You make something, you read something, you make something else, someone reads something that you made and it goes on and on.

**SPEAKER D:** Can you clarify what you mean about your lack of faith in human beings and the paradox it poses for art making?

**PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS:** I was being very general with that comment. I want to create works that rewrite social contracts, asking people what is publicness? What isn't public space? What is citizenship? What is participation? What is democracy? All these activities I do with enthusiasm, but somehow, I also have to admit, without any faith of a better tomorrow.

**ANDREA GEYER:** I wanted to go back to this idea of the disruption. There used to be this moment, in a lecture like this, where people would just get up, talk back, engage and disrupt. And I think there's something similar with discourse. None of these people writing these brilliant texts that we are giving out to read, and reading ourselves, expected you to just take them and nod, they wanted you to engage them critically. They were committed to a practice of critical thought and thinking. I want to make a stand for art practice and not only the relational aesthetics, or the schools. I want it to be engaged more and more consciously. And have that be a bigger deal, or something.

**DOUG ASHFORD:** A bigger deal?

**ANDREA GEYER:** A bigger deal and with the same power as an intervention, as a disruption.

**PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS** : But, I would even say, that discursive practice in the gallery is healthier than the discursive practice here, in the sense that no one is getting up and challenging us. But when people approach an artwork, they have strong emotions and judgments. It's heartening how art has somehow, against all odds, maintained a healthy space for the viewer.

**ANDREA GEYER**: But I don't want a kind of "either/or." I want an "and." Like, the school *and* the artwork *and* the critic *and* the writing *and* the discussion.

**DOUG ASHFORD**: *And* the street protest.

**ANDREA GEYER**: *And* the street protest.

**PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS**: At this moment, art has a certain advantage to make a manifestation, to create a protest with a certain kind of effect. In Spanish, the word *manifestation* has a resemblance to the word *protest*. These are manifestations, because it's almost shamanistic. It *manifests* itself and somehow the right movements and the right things will be said in the right order, and they will have a magical effect. Almost like a rain dance would have an effect.

**Doug Ashford** is a teacher, artist, and Associate Professor at The Cooper Union where he has taught design, sculpture and theory for many years.

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