

We Begin In the Imperial Belly

This book includes examples from predominantly North America and Europe. There are many more individuals and groups that I would have liked to include but that will have to be included in an expanded book or additional framework. —MJ

Introduction

Byproducts and Parasites: on the Excess of Embedded Art Practices

By Marisa Jahn and L.M. Bogad

A *byproduct*, commonly understood, is defined as:

1. Something produced in the making of something else.
2. A secondary result; a side effect.

A *system*, commonly understood, is a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole; a harmonious arrangement or pattern; and/or an organized society or social situation regarded as stultifying or oppressive.

Embedding Difference

Narrator: Camille Turner is a Canadian artist of African descent who invented a persona named “Miss Canadiana.” Appearing in public in a floor-length red gown, tiara, and white sash imprinted with this self-given title, the costume allows Turner to tread past boundaries, and appear as a VIP guest at a panoply of otherwise prohibited events (political functions, military guard ceremonies, tourist sites, pageants). Turner herself does not physiologically conform to the mainstream public’s expectations of beauty. However, by invoking the gesture and iconography of beauty pageantry, Miss Canadiana reconditions expectations about beauty and race.

Turner recalls a vivid experience on a trip to North Preston, Nova Scotia, where Miss Canadiana was paraded through the streets on the hood of a fancy car to greet the town’s residents. The tour ended with a reception at a community centre where Miss Canadiana gave a short talk. Not promoted as an art event, Turner describes her sense of curiosity about what would happen when she revealed that Miss Canadiana was an invented character that investigated her sense of racial exclusion in Canada. Amidst the audience’s whispers and stirs, someone in the audience stood up and abruptly turned on the lights.

“You mean you just made all this up?” one woman questioned.

Turner replied, “Yes. The pageant was filmed in my backyard.”

“So, you mean, we could do this too?”

Turner recalled, “I smiled broadly. As I travel across the country Miss Canadiana continues to inspire those who see themselves when they look at me.” The presence of Miss Canadiana thus allows others to recognize the facture of public self-presentation, and offers a means to envisage the otherwise.

Slavoj Žižek describes the psychic liberation of deploying a stand-in to substitute for the self: “By surrendering my innermost content, including my dreams and anxieties, to the Other, a space opens up in which I am free to breathe: when the Other laughs for me, I am free to take a rest; when the Other sacrifices instead of me, I am free to go on living with the awareness that I did atone for my guilt; and so on.” Žižek argues that psychic displacement, in fact, regulates normalcy—even for the individual who “knows better,” and “behaves as if,” this self-consciousness does not obviate the experience of cathartic release. Figures such as Miss Canadiana might be seen as stand-ins that allow anxieties and hopes to emerge; subsequently, through practice, through their enactment, the stand-in becomes confluent with reality.

Consider the advantages of camouflage—it enables the organism to slip and slink into its surrounds. In *Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia* (1937), Roger Caillois examines the way that insect mimicry entails not only morphological simulation, but also the restructuring of space and perception. For instance, an insect’s development of colour patches to match surfaces, dapples of light, and variance along depths of field induces visual fragmentation. In extreme forms, such as the praying mantis and the walking stick insect, animals adapt behaviour to match the movements of their surrounds. Caillois, however, warns against the risk of self-dissolution faced by the camouflaged organism. “It is with represented space that the drama becomes specific, since the living creature, the organism, is no longer the origin of the coordinates, but one point among others; it is dispossessed of its privilege, and literally no longer knows where to place itself.” The moral inflection of Caillois’ bio-phenomenological studies are echoed in a conversation included in this volume between the artist Pedro Reyes and Antanas Mockus, the former mayor of Bogotá, Colombia. For Mockus, a relevant or impactful academic necessarily works between sectors, fields, and constituencies. This task, he suggests, demands a judicious balance between assimilation and moral retention. “Cultural amphibians are related to chameleons, but guard themselves from having that camouflage become ethical duplicity.” Mockus’ analogy of the camouflaged entity that risks disappearing into its context is ultimately a warning about the dangers of moral relativism and the loss of political agency.

While the walking stick insect is not concerned with such issues, a human being misrepresenting himself might. Take, for example, those dissidents in Nazi Germany who camouflaged themselves as loyal subjects of the Reich in order to escape persecution. For these individuals, delivering the “Sieg Heil” salute to their compatriots many times a day likely may have felt psychically draining, and even ideologically demoralizing. While for Caillois and Mockus the radically de-centered self induces a state of psychosis, or schizophrenia, philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari offer a more fluid model that hails the collapse of binary logic (figure vs. ground, self vs. whole) as a felicitous implosion that dismantles essentialist notions of being and truth. They posit instead a more dynamic notion of becoming.

Mimicry is a very bad concept, since it relies on binary logic to describe

phenomena of an entirely different nature. The crocodile does not reproduce a tree trunk, any more than the chameleon reproduces the color of its surroundings. The Pink Panther imitates nothing, it reproduces nothing, it paints the world its color, pink on pink; this is its becoming-world, carried out in such a way that it becomes imperceptible itself, asignifying, makes its rupture, its own line of flight, follows its 'parallel evolution' to the end.

In other words, for Deleuze and Guattari, the camouflaged organism "paints the world its color," slipping between an autonomous self and an environment, the singular and the organizational, the visibility and the invisible—it vacillates from its very contextual instability, unconscious at times of its aptitude for adaptation.

This play in that very tension between assimilation and distinction describes a strategy of contemporary art production some have referred to as "embedded art practices." Some embedded art practices seek to completely assimilate, surfacing or showing themselves at critical junctures; others foreground their difference as the very means of activating their surrounds. Sometimes it is beyond the control of the artist to remain indistinct, and circumstances pronounce his/her difference. Embedded art practices are cousins of other process-based (as opposed to "object-based") practices, known by terms such as "service aesthetics," "post-studio practices," "post-mimetic practices," "relational aesthetics," "interventionist works," "site-specific practices," and "contextualist artworks." As its key distinction, however, embedded art practices are ones in which the artist becomes parasitically reliant on its institutional "host" to produce a "byproduct" of the system—this is the artwork. A certain intimacy and reliance between parasite and host evolves. As Michel Serres writes:

The relation with a host presupposes a permanent or semi-permanent contact with him; such is the case for the louse, the tapeworm, the *pasturella pestis*. Not only living *on* but also living *in*—by him, with him, and in him . . . [The parasite] enters the body [of the host] and ingests it. Its infectious power is measured by its capability to adapt itself to one or several hosts. This capability fluctuates, and its virulence varies along with its production of toxic substances.

For Serres, the "infectious" and "toxic" capacity of the parasite is inextricably bound with its ability to assimilate. Embedded practices, therefore, signify not from a position of pure oppositionality (antagonism), but one in which oppositionality is irreconcilably bound up with an empathic relationship to the larger whole (agonism). Michel Foucault explicates this as a distinction: "Rather than speaking of an essential antagonism, it would be better to speak of "agonism"—of a relationship that is at the same time mutual incitement and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation that paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation." From the vantage of the embedded artist, such a "permanent provocation" is often valorized as an indicator of flux within a system, and the prospect of difference.

Bogad: Hold on a minute. I think we're going to have to address the negative connotation of the words "tapeworm" and "parasite," aren't we? Don't artists, and especially socially engaged artists, have enough problems these days? The metaphor is playfully nauseating, and holds up nicely... but (*uplifting classical music fades up gently*)...

maybe we're the grain of sand that the oyster is irritated by, so it ends up producing a pearl? Something more flowery and marketable? Sorry to surface from the bowels of our essay in such an energy-draining way...

Marisa: No, Larry, it's cool. It's about *time* we talk about this, actually. I think it's helpful to look at the etymology and different usages of the word "parasite." For one thing, we should note that Narrator is a bit of a Francophile, and here he is quite heavily drawing from Michel Serres, the French post-structuralist thinker. According to Serres, the word "parasite" in French has a different connotation.

Narrator: Why yes, it does. Cary Wolfe, who provides one of the most interesting interpretations of Serres' work, points out a third and unsuspected meaning of the French word "parasite." Wolfe writes:

The word "parasite" derives its meaning from the Latin words "para" (beside) and "sitos" (food): (1) Biological parasite; (2) Social parasite; (3) static or interference. As we know from classical information theory and its model of the signal-to-noise ration, noise was typically regarded as simply the extraneous background against which a given message or signal was transmitted from a sender to receiver. Joining a lineage of systems theorists such as Gregory Bateson and Niklas Luhman, Michel Serres writes that noise is *productive* and creative: "noise, through its presence and absence, the intermittence of the signal, produces the new system."

Marisa: What Narrator means to say is that if we think about a parasite not as a little thing that is singularly preying on a larger host, but as an entity that is contributing a beat to the overall rhythm, then the pejorative connotation of the word is neutralized.

Narrator: If parasitism is not a one-way usurpation of power, but a recursive chain of gestures in which we are taking turns relying on and giving to one another, then we've transformed the notion of a parasite into a figure that plays an alimentary function.

Marisa: "Alimentary?"

Narrator: Yes, "alimentary." As in, you know, "nurturing." *Narrator sighs condescendingly, shakes head.*

To continue... In embedded art practices, there is always a complicity on behalf of the institutional host. In many cultures, being a guest or host are coterminous— the French word *hôte*, for example, corresponds to both "host" and "guest" in English. Jacques Derrida offers the term "ipseity" to describe the twin poles of hospitality and hostility, which he sees as a kind of choreography of complicity between multiple entities...

Marisa: "Ipseity." I *like* that... That's a pretty useful term for describing situations like the one Turner was describing when she didn't know how the crowd was going to react. Although, I wouldn't know how to use it in a sentence.

Larry: Right, that's tough, but we've all teetered along that "ipseitic" axis, when they've let us in, but we don't know if we're to be feted or sacrificed, (*looks towards audience*) and they haven't decided yet, either...

Marisa: *Whispering to Larry.* Well, technically they have a few more pages before they have to decide what they're going to do with us.

Narrator: To continue... While Turner's smiling and gracious "Miss Canadiana" persona presents a palatable and non-confrontational way of confronting difference, the artist Darren O'Donnell, working collaboratively with others under the moniker "Mammalian Diving Reflex," creates projects that foreground what the participant knows will be socially awkward frameworks. The titles of Mammalian's projects indicate that confronting one's "discomfort with discomfort" is part of the artwork itself—"Haircuts by Children," "Slow Dance with Teacher," and "Children's Choice Awards" (the latter which are awards bestowed by kids at high-profile art or film galas). O'Donnell likens his projects to a process of "social acupuncture":

The feeling of the needles during acupuncture can vary. It can just plain hurt, like you'd expect of any needle. But more often, the sensations are of a whole other order; the needle can feel heavy and almost nauseating at the point of entry; it can feel electric, the sensation travelling the length of the nerve; it can feel kind of itchy. It can also reproduce the sensation you're trying to eliminate by getting acupuncture in the first place, just like a shoulder massage can initially hurt but lead to a more relaxed state. Analogous sensations and effects are felt with social acupuncture. The social awkwardness and tension it generates can feel stupid, the projects seeming to constantly teeter on the brink of embarrassment and failure. As any system experiences a shift into higher complexity, there will be a time when it feels like there has been a drop in understanding, dexterity, or control.

For Turner, O'Donnell, and many artists working in an embedded capacity, the discomfiting aspects of the process are the tools of the trade. Their institutional hosts, however, often have a more complex relationship to their expectations for what might occur, and whether it is art. In many cases, the institution may not know it is unwittingly "hosting" the artist within its system. Other times, the artist will use a "Trojan horse" strategy in which a tangible or traditional art project is offered, but all the time the "real" artwork happens as a series of processes along the way. In these cases, the institutional host may, in fact, understand that *something* critical indeed is happening, but they do not have a means to formally recognize it. Barbara Steveni, co-founder of Artists Placement Group recalls a corporate manager from IBM who said to her, "If what I think you are doing is true, then you have no business being here; but if you're not doing what I think you are doing, then you're wasting your time." Rare and visionary are those cases when the institutional host itself is able to anticipate difference, discomfort, and change. Founder of The Xerox Parc's Artist in Residency Program that sought to pair artists with scientists, John Seely Brown uses the phrase "productive friction" to valorize the provocation naturally occurring in cross-disciplinary exchange:

In the business world's relentless quest for efficiency over the past several

decades, most executives have become conditioned to believe that all friction is bad... Friction was a sign of waste and needed to be rooted out wherever it reared its ugly head. Perhaps we are even too hasty in dismissing all friction. Perhaps we should learn to embrace friction, even to seek it out and to encourage it, when it promises to provide opportunities for learning and capability building. We need institutional frameworks that can help foster productive friction, and the learning that comes with it, rather than the dysfunctional friction that we too often encounter in large corporations around the world today.

Interestingly, Brown recognizes that rather than seeing it as a waste of corporate resources, instead friction might be regarded as a means of testing limits, and ultimately bolstering the epistemological frameworks of an institution.

The aesthetics of embedded art practices.

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THE AESTHETICS OF EMBEDDED ART PRACTICES.

Narrator pauses, looking downwards meaningfully.

Larry: ...what?

Narrator: The aesthetics of embedded art *practices!* That's the title of the next chapter: "The Aesthetics of Embedded Art Practices."

Larry: Wait – but what was the title of the section we just went over?

Narrator: It was called "Embedding Difference." Only I didn't say it. I was *thinking* it.

Larry: Oh—ok, sorry. Go on.

Narrator: Well, for the embedded artist, the negotiation of different environs often necessitates a comfort in shifting behavioural and linguistic registers. The cultural theorist Doris Somner refers to these moments as junctures within a game of "code-switching" and "side-stepping." For Somner, when the subject deliberates the proper means of address, he/she occupies a philosophical relation to language and multiple ego-positions. Characterizing this "bilingual aesthetics," "externality is always visible and audible, and it goads movement rather than marks impasses. Multi-tongued engagements are opportunities for a range of performances and asymmetrical receptions." As a code-switcher who revels when "one tongue invades another," and for whom "rubbing words the wrong way feels right," the embedded artist typically embraces those moments when originary creation and individualist notions of authorship give way to a subjectivity based on movement and participation. Celebrating the sensuality within intersubjectivity, Serres writes, "the 'we' is less a set of 'I's than a set of the sets of its transmissions. It appears brutally in drunkenness and ecstasy, both annihilations of the principle of individuation."

A collaboration by Larry Bogad, Andrew Boyd, and The Yes Men, *The New York Post Special Edition* is a newspaper spoof that presents the realities of our planet's ecological catastrophe. In an interview included in this book, the three reflect on the importance of mastering the logic and language of their host. Muses Bogad, "I don't know what this says about me but the collective seemed to agree that I was really internalizing the voice of *The Post* writer." Boyd rejoins, "That's correct. Larry had it—he was breathing it. It came very naturally and he's a very dangerous person because of that." Like Bogad, the embedded artist listens to the rhythms and murmurs of a system; he/she observes its loopholes, states of exception, downtimes, strengths, contours, and vulnerabilities; he/she becomes master of the system's patterns, and engages its logic to produce the artwork itself. What results is a byproduct that reveals the contingency of a system, and the possibilities of its redirect.

Marisa: *Turning to Larry, whispering.* It's funny to hear yourself quoted by a third person, no?

Now turning to Narrator. Narrator, I'm a little confused. Would you mind saying that last bit again—maybe this time in different words?

Narrator: Sure. Embedded artists engage systems, and they try to make the system itself produce the work. While "things" may be produced along the way, the artwork lies in its very capacity to re-sensitize us to affective relations. This is the byproduct—that resplendent excess produced by the system itself, that moment where the body or the "grain of the voice" begins to emerge, that place of incomplete ideological subjection, that indivisible remainder at the end of the calculation that cannot be squared away, that moment that reminds of the bright possibilities of the otherwise—*turning to Marisa.* Did that help at all?

Marisa: Well, somewhat.

Larry: Hey, not to butt in, but MJ, should I take a stab at rewriting the last bit up there so that it segues into what Narrator is going to say about—

Narrator: Shhhh! Again?!

Marisa: Oh—sorry! *To Larry.* Just let him go on.

Narrator: For some embedded practices, the appropriation of an institution's logic involves mastering not only the language but the look and feel of its official documents, or what philosopher John Searle refers to as "status indicators"—policemen's uniforms, wedding rings, marriage certificates, drivers' licenses, passports, etc. Searle also employs the term "deontic powers" to describe the process and ceremonies by which powers are conferred between subjects to reify institutional beliefs:

An institution is any collectively accepted system of rules (procedures, practices) that enable us to create institutional facts. ... Human institutions are, above all, *enabling*, because they create power, but it is a special kind of

power. It is the power that is marked by such terms as: rights, duties, obligations, authorizations, permissions, empowerments, requirements, and certifications. I call these “deontic powers.”

Playfully conceding to these roles of status indicators and deontic powers can be subversive.

Marisa: “Deontic?”

Narrator: For example, many of the artists in this book such as N.E. Thing Co., Artists Placement Group, Experiments in Art and Technology, and Maureen Connor/Kadambari Baxi all critically adopt the look and feel of the corporations they work with. When Steve Mann, Janez Janša, and Kristin Lucas interact with clerks, politicians, and judges, they remind us that institutions are composed of other humans who invented a fallible set of conventions, but ones that at some point got reified as institutional practices. The invented characters of Mr. Peanut and Reverend Billy, respectively running as mayoral candidates of Vancouver and New York, parodically exploit the familiar strictures of electoral politics. So too does Antanas Mockus, but from the position of the elected mayor of Bogotá.

As Slavoj Žižek suggests, the subject is, in fact, aware of this process of hegemonic replication, and accordingly participates in this social construction of reality: “We all know very well that bureaucracy is not all-powerful, but our effective conduct in the presence of bureaucratic machinery is already regulated by a belief in its almightiness...” For Žižek, however, participation in the hegemonic process does not preclude a critical distance nor foreclose its subversion; participation “as if” merely allows the subject to maintain cognitive and psychic coherency. He writes:

What we call “social reality” is in the last resort an ethical construction; it is supported by a certain “as if” (we act *as if* we believe in the almightiness of bureaucracy, *as if* the President incarnates the Will of the People, *as if* the Party expresses the objective interest of the working class...). As soon as the belief (which, let us remind ourselves again, is definitely not to be conceived at a “psychological level”: it is embodied, materialized, in the effective functioning of the social field) is lost, the very texture of the social field disintegrates.

For Žižek, behaving “as if” accedes on the one hand to the necessity of adhering to the social construction of reality, and on the other hand, acknowledging its contingency.

Marisa: Do you mean to say that the artists discussed in this book are embodying the doubly conscious position of the “as if?”

Larry: Or, maybe what Narrator is saying parallels Stanislavsky’s “magic if,” an exercise on the part of the imagination of the actor, designed to trigger emotional specificity and realism that will in turn trigger a suspension of disbelief, and thus emotional investment, on the part of the audience for the “truth” of the play they are watching. And—

Narrator: Žižek further postulates that—

Marisa: Well, hold on, you big lug! Larry was speaking...

Larry: No, it's ok, let him go. I exhausted that tired line of thinking...

Narrator: ... Žižek says that it is this self-conscious recognition of an incomplete ideological subjection that produces enjoyment (*jouissance*):

... 'Internalization', by structural necessity, never fully succeeds, [...] there is always a residue, a leftover, a stain of traumatic irrationality and senselessness sticking to it, and that *this leftover, far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, is the very condition of it*: it is precisely this non-integrated surplus of senseless traumatism which confers on the Law its unconditional authority: in other words, which—in so far as it escapes ideological sense—sustains what we might call the ideological *jouis-sense*, enjoyment-in-sense (enjoy-meant), proper to the ideological.

Marisa: Wait, so is he saying that appropriating this leftover, and embodying or rendering it, is what produces a kind of mirth? Maybe it's kind of like what you mentioned in your book about electoral politics, Larry...

Larry: Well, in the sense that a sort of radical ridicule—or, ridicule armed with a fundamental structural critique, explicit or implicit—operates when a guerrilla artist runs for public office, as, say a working class African-American drag queen such as Joan Jett Blakk. All sorts of unmarked exclusionary devices in the system are tripped and triggered with every step that JettBlakk takes in her high heels—to literally, transgressive comic effect.

Narrator: For Žižek, the Law, or the hegemonic “Other,” as an ultimately arbitrary and contingent system, is incapable of completely dominating the subject. There is always a remainder—an excess, *jouissance*, or *byproduct*. It is this excess—this critical distance—and this place of “mirth,” which allows the subject to identify with the Law or the hegemon; this excess is this place from which insurrection or alterability arises.

Larry: Wait—the excess is the root both of identification with the oppressor, and the possibility of insurrection...?

Marisa: Well, let's end on that note—“insurrection.”

Although I'm sorry, I've gotten ahead of myself because I *do* have some pragmatic things that we need to mention about this book's contents. The first section, “Producing Byproducts (Artists in Industries),” traces a lineage of twentieth century artists who worked with industries from the vantage point of an agent moving in and out of being fully immersed and critically disengaged. The second section, “Performing Politics,” features artists who engage a range of institutions—the electoral politics, judicial courts, elementary schools, and other forms of everyday bureaucracy. By including contemporary examples alongside historical precedents, I

intend to foreground the legacy of these projects, many of which have evaded traditional forms of canonization. Pepered throughout the book are responses to primary texts by thinkers coming from the fields of architecture, biology, political economy, art, and more.

Pauses meaningfully. Narrator, Larry, and Marisa look up. Audience applauds.

Preface to Producing & It's Byproducts (Art & Commerce)

By Marisa Jahn

This section of the book includes artists' practices that involve working in and with industries; the case studies highlighted are artists who have approached institutions themselves, and whose work retains a high degree of critical autonomy from their institutional hosts.

At times, the capacity of an embedded practice to adapt to its institutional host (or system) is driven by socio-economic or other structural determinants. For example, the funding structure of Canada's cultural sector in the early 1970s changed because of an extension to fields outside traditional art, as well as the integration of communication technologies previously used exclusively by business sectors. With the intent of reducing unemployment, the Canadian Department of Manpower and Immigration launched two programs in 1971—*Young Canada Works* and *Local Initiatives* (LIP/PIL)—that sought to create jobs within artist-run centres. To encourage the diversification of revenue streams, one requirement of LIP/PIL was to involve non-art sectors in their professional activities. This mandate was taken up by artists' groups, many which adopted communication and informatic technology to broadcast their message to new audiences. In his exhibition and publication series entitled *Documentary Protocols* that charts the rise of artists working as cultural organizations, Vincent Bonin points to the influence of the LIP/PIL initiative on the formation of North American art collectives such as Intermedia Society, Image Bank, Art Official/General Idea/*FILE Magazine*, Vehicle, and the Montreal and Toronto chapters of Experiments in Art & Technology, and N.E. Thing Co. For these groups, the support from LIP/PIL allowed them to integrate new tools that significantly shaped their aesthetic practices—Sony's Portapak (a portable camera and video recorder system commercially released in 1967), printing technology, and transmission devices such as the Telex machine. These tools gave them a means to speak the language of their institutional surrounds.

Incorporated in 1966, by Ingrid Baxter Ovesen and IAIN BAXTER& (formerly known as Iain Baxter), N.E. Thing Co. in its early years operated as a business that offered services ranging from "visual sensitivity" consultations to the integration of the informatic technology. Through their rapport with the Canadian Board of Trade and their endorsement by Ronald Basford, Canada's then Minister of Corporate Affairs, NETCO worked to meet the needs of varied companies, responding in turn with the proliferation of "departments" entitled "Thing," "Research," "Movie," "Project," "ACT & ART," "Service," "COP," "Printing," "Photography," "Communications," and "Consulting." To recruit they set up booths in trade fairs of diverse fields. The Baxter's experimental approach is emblemized in their use of the Telex, a new form of technology at the time that shocked the cultural sphere and ignited artistic possibilities. In an interview with Grant Arnold published in this book, Ingrid Baxter describes the Telex machine as a means to transgress the traditional barriers of the art world: "We could send images and penetrate into companies at night, and they would receive it in the morning." Writing about NETCO's

participation in the Data Processing Management Association (DPMA) conferences in Vancouver and Seattle, art historian and critic Adam Lauder points out that NETCO's booth was seen by over twenty thousand conference-goers—an exposure that would have exceeded the possibilities of any existing art venue. The self-same entrepreneurial and genre-bending sensibility informed the Baxter's subsequent development of enterprises such as a photo lab and a restaurant.

A shared interest in transcending disciplinary divides drove the formation of Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), founded in New York City in 1966 by Billy Klüver, Fred Waldhauer, Robert Rauschenberg, and Robert Whitman. Active until the 1980s with Klüver at its forefront, E.A.T.'s mission was to fuse art, science, and industry around different projects. For Klüver, experimentation was both a means and an end for an artist's collaboration with other disciplines:

Today, the artist moves into working with materials where unfamiliarity with the material and its physical limitations become an important element of his work. The old assumption that the artist must know his material before he acts no longer has the same meaning. The contemporary artist is developing an attitude toward his new materials similar to that of the experimental scientist. Experimentation and process become an integral part of the artist's work.

To meet the demands of the contemporary artist, E.A.T. actively recruited members from major research institutions (Bell, MIT, National Standards, etc.), and through a booth set up at the annual engineering trade fair—the IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers). E.A.T., then, was made possible through the training and technical resources developed in corporate research laboratories. Klüver went so far as to suggest that experimentation could not exist otherwise. As he suggested in a talk at the Museum of Modern Art in 1968, “Thus it is essential for the artist to have permanent and organic access not only to existing technical facilities and materials, but also to facilities for experimentation. Only industry can give the artist what he wants. It would be, at this point, not only wrong but sheer indulgence to think in terms of setting up separate laboratories and facilities for artists to work in.”

With impressive rigour and scope, E.A.T.'s varied projects demonstrated a reliance between the artistic and corporate sectors. The Technical Services Program, first begun in 1971 as a telephone hotline, matched about six thousand artists with engineers and helped the formation of approximately five hundred artworks. Second, varied programs (lectures, projects) served to acquaint the public, spur innovation, and explore the expressive capacity of emergent technologies such as computer-generated images and sounds, video, synthetic materials, lasers, holography, and robotics. Michelle Kuo's essay in this book examines *9 Evenings*:

Theatre and Engineering, an event that took place at the 69th Regiment Armory in New York City from October 13-23, 1966, as a formative moment in E.A.T. as an organization. As Kuo investigates, E.A.T. arose from the methodological questions posed in the production *9 Evenings*—how to integrate disparate bodies of knowledge through “interfaces,” and how to embrace, anticipate, and incorporate risk. For E.A.T., then, technological innovation, and the need for artists/engineers to adapt to the constraints of other disciplines spurred a self-reflexive epistemological inquiry.

The self-same need to discover models of working with non-art sectors was heralded as one of the chief outcomes of Artist Placement Group (APG, now known as O+I or Organization and Imagination), founded by Barbara Stevani and John Latham in 1966, and active until 1991. The scope of APG's placements is impressive, claiming dozens of successful placements in corporations such as British Airways, ICI Fibers Ltd., the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, Brunei University, the National Coal Board, and the Intensive Care Unit of Clare Hall Hospital. Barbara Stevani, founder of APG/O+I, describes this gradual discovery of "optimal" associations between art and industry in an interview with Josephine Berry and Pauline van Mourik Broekman:

It was only by doing the industrial placements that we [APG] began to find out how art activity, or how as artists, an optimum association might be developed which complied with making an artwork in these contexts—so that both sides were getting something out of it.

Stevani also mentions the challenges and discoveries of work-placements.

So after the industrial placements, which were seen as kind of terrible by the majority of the art world, for tangling with this "dirt" so to speak—I was personally, and artists that we worked with, able to find out just what sort of exchange and engagement could be had in these situations. What we discovered was that we have to take great care to preserve the integrity of art's motivation *vis-à-vis* the commercial and political interests around.

By "preserv[ing] the integrity of art's motivation," Stevani refers to APG/O+I's insistence that an artist's critical position is at times uncoincident with the immediate goals of the organization, but that this difference should be valorized. As APG/O+I declare in their manifesto written in 1980, "...The status of the artist within organisations is independent, bound by the invitation, rather than by any instruction from authority within the organisation, and to the long-term objectives of the whole of society." In his essay on APG included in this book, Peter Eeley notes, "This dematerialization, this emphatic refusal to give form or definition to the placement itself, seemed designed expressly to critique the notion of an object- and product-based society—and, in that way, may have gone further than any other contemporaneous Conceptual practices, most of which were content to take aim simply at the art market and the museum." But this rigour and commitment was not without its costs: "APG did so sometimes at significant cost, vanishing into its rhetoric and practice, lost in what looked to anyone else like straightforward social service activities, albeit practised by artists. Certain of its activities, resulting only in government reports and correspondence, disappeared into the bureaucracy." Claire Bishop, interviewed about APG, suggests that the "bureaucratic flavour" of APG's highly informational installations turned away many art critics. Others such as Stephen Wright have argued that it is this uncompromisingly conceptual approach and the disregard for formalist concerns that makes APG's work so refreshingly radical. Further, APG's insistence that "context is half the work" characterizes what Grant Kester describes as the hallmark of an "aesthetics of listening"—a paradigm that regards listening and understanding as a constitutive act, counterposed, in fact, to

the Western emphasis on declaration and assertion.

The self-same threat of indiscernability or dissolution, counterbalanced by a belief in the liberatory opportunities afforded from working “on the outside,” pervades each project or practice highlighted in this book. In 2000—in a vein similar to APG’s work-placements—Kent Hansen founded “democratic innovation,” which strives to develop participatory frameworks, oftentimes with the workers of a particular institution. Lamenting the insular tendencies of market-driven art worlds and the social importance of finding new models of operating, Hansen posits that “the risk of doing ‘non-art world stuff’ is, of course, exclusion from the art world... However, working ‘outside’ is perhaps the only way to begin to direct ‘art’ at a future.” At once idealistic, utopian, and pragmatic, these themes are charted in the contribution to this volume by Felicity Tayler, an artist, writer, and cultural organizer whose practice incorporates her talents honed as an information professional. In her account of the lineages of artists working in industries, Tayler charts the central tenets of artists’ work-placements from the 1960s onward.

Paul Ardenne’s essay in this section complicates a straightforward and earnest rationale typically espoused by art work-placements. For one, Ardenne pokes holes in the assumption that it is possible for an artist to operate as a neutral negotiator and suggests that he/she has a personal stake in occupying such a position. Despite the fact that the artist-as-negotiator may share the altruistic objective of achieving social cohesion, there are other personal motivations at stake such as the desire to secure a place of social relevancy in what has become as an increasingly networked culture.

While Ardenne’s essay comes across as highly skeptical of the humanist rhetoric espoused by “economics art,” those included in the section almost always foreground the problematics of assuming as such. A particularly playful riposte to Ardenne’s concerns is Tomas Jonsson’s “Harkapood” project, which involves the creation of a temporary store in a small town in rural Estonia. The “store” is composed of goods that are legitimately purchased from the stores he mimics, sold to passersby at the same price. The revenue earned from the items sold was then used to subsequently buy other goods. Operating without any fiscal gain, Jonsson’s economically superfluous position points towards commercial transactions as a means of social exchange. The title of Jonsson’s shop, “Harkapood” (which in English refers to the magpie, a bird that steals the nests of others to make their own), foregrounds his outsider status, and the agonistic dynamic emblematic in almost all embedded practices. Michel Serres describes the strategy of the parasite that, like Jonsson, positions him/herself in this position as the exchanger of goods, and as such, one who profits:

He sets the prices or discusses it. It is essential that he has the isolated spot-unique, at the intersection, the knot, the neck, of the two parts of the hourglass. The one who holds this position produces, with himself at the origin, divisions and dichotomies... The translator places himself in the center or at the heart of the hourglass, or of any hourglass, as does the shopkeeper, as does Maxwell’s demon. They transform the flows that pass through the exchange. They ease passage, control it, and relate to the one-to-one... The parasite has placed itself in the most profitable positions, at the intersection of

relations. The elementary link of his individual activity was to relate to a relation; its performances are far better in spots where several relations cross or meet... The one who succeeds in the relation of many-one, forms it and makes it work, is the politician and has found power. As is often said, he has the power of decision: of course, since he is at the crossings, the intercuttings: here, the intersection.

For Serres, the parasite *charges* or *imprints* the goods or message. He/she does not occupy a place of neutrality, but is, in fact, a catalyst towards a system and its particular inflections. "The message, passing through his hands in the location of the exchanger, is the changer. It arrives neither pure nor unvarying nor stable... What is true is that the message is burdened and arrives thus burdened. To speak correctly, it is parasited." In other works, the parasited message looks towards the recipient/audience for complicity or participation.

A Constructed World (ACW) is a collaborative group formed by Jacqueline Riva and Geoff Lowe whose practice includes facilitating art-based workshops with corporations. In an interview with Joseph del Pesco about their project that involved a group of employees from the Banque Nationale de Paris (BNP) in the summer of 2009 who recreated the riots of the infamous Altamont rock concert of 1969. When asked to describe their method of engagement, ACW remarked, "We believe that the wider public does understand contemporary art perfectly well but have their own—often appropriate—reasons for pretending and saying they don't. We want to include what people know in the artworks even if they're not aware they know anything or are being disingenuous." In other words, it's not that the general public doesn't know about artwork, it's that they refuse showing their cards, pretending not to know.

A similarly humorous sensibility that belies a complex understanding permeates the work of *Au Travail/At Work*, a collective founded in Montreal in 2004. In this book, artists Gina Badger and Adam Bobbette interview the collective's founder (alias "Bob the Builder"), who acknowledges that the predominance of artists in North America operate at a net loss and have to keep a day job to pay the bills. Given this, questions "Bob," why not steal back one's time from those who profit from it? Why not situate one's own—and here he would say, "shitty"—day job as a site for artistic work-placement? *Au Travail/At Work* thus consists of documentation by "Bob" and others of artwork created in quotidian workplaces—photos of anonymous workers bathing in the oil vat at a fast food chain, anecdotes about a plastic surgeon who fuels his Mercedes-Benz on the liposuctioned fat of his clients, casually snapped photos of Styrofoam coffee cup sculptures, documentation by an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher who, instead of giving examples based on useless hypothetical scenarios, instead pragmatically instructs his/her participants on how to file letters of complaint, etc. *Au Travail's* theory on self-determination (*libre-arbitre*, in French) favours a symptomatic (rather than structural) response to a systemic problem. While this viewpoint might appear to espouse a position of political resignation, the project of *Au Travail* as a whole raises important questions about self-examination, and warns against the pitfalls of exoticizing the workplace or industrial other. So too, *Au Travail's* *modus operandi* of creating artwork from the margin of existing workplaces lends valence to the notion of the "byproduct," or artwork produced from within and as a result of existing systems.

Preface to "Performing Politics"

By Marisa Jahn

"The isotope," Aji writes, "is an element, that by the presence of an additional or removed neutron, a small particle in its nucleus is differentiated. It is specifically different while belonging, bearing a discernable mark, weight, or sense of difference, as well as an essential sameness." Both belonging and different, the isotopic artist provokes the reconsideration of existing truths. The "radioactive"—or generative—effect of the isotopic artist's tactic is illustrated by the many examples when others recognize that self-invention is a strategy they too can adopt. Parodic figures hovering between authenticity and irreverence, the very presence of these "isotopes" destabilizes the ontological status of other institutions, pointing towards their facture.

The Yes Men are perhaps the most well known artists in this generation who emblemize Aji's figure of the isotope. Featured in this book is an interview with Yes Men's Andy Bichlbaum and two artist-activists, Andrew Boyd & Larry Bogad, who discuss a newspaper they produced spoofing one of New York City's Rupert Murdoch-owned, right-wing newspapers, the *New York Post*. Major reactionary newspapers are only one of the targets for this kind of action.

Of lasting influence in the Canadian public imaginary is "Mr. Peanut," a character invented in 1971 by John Mitchell and artist Vincent Trasov, who together ran for mayor of Vancouver. Throughout his mayoral run, Trasov would suit up in a life-sized costume resembling the Planter's Peanut character used to advertise comestible peanuts. Outfitted with spats, cane, and top hat, Mitchell performed as Mr. Peanut's spokesperson while Mr. Peanut, himself silent, would tap-dance in accompaniment to his backup singers, the Peanettes. Whether behind a podium adjacent to the other candidates or in the newspaper emblazoned with punning headlines, Mr. Peanut's very presence mocked the efforts of the other "serious" candidates. Mr. Peanut ended up placing third in the mayoral race, but his influence on the political imaginary of Canadians evidences Bogad's thesis—that one of the outcomes of "electoral guerilla theatre" is its galvanization of an otherwise disenfranchised constituency. Harkening a utopic future possible in the present, Mr. Peanut's campaign posters read, "A New Mayor; A New Era. Vancouver Civic Election, 1974."

Reverend Billy is a character invented by artists William Talen and Savitri Durkee. An ordained minister whose comedic presence hovers between irreverence and earnestness, Reverend Billy adopts the costume, inflections, and fiery rhetoric of an evangelical soap box preacher to broadcast messages about sustainable ecology, supporting local businesses, and civil rights issues. In accompaniment to Reverend Billy is a forty-person gospel choir called "The Life After Shopping Gospel Choir," and a wide network of "believers." Reverend Billy thus functions as a vehicle of belief: he absorbs collective aspirations, and in turn, embodies an alternate

worldview that energizes the larger whole. This is the role of the parasite: “The parasite is an exciter. Far from transforming a system, changing its nature, its form, its elements, its relations, and its pathways... the parasite makes it change states differentially. It inclines it. It makes the equilibrium of the energetic distribution fluctuate... Often this inclination has no effect, but it can produce gigantic ones by chain reactions or reproduction.”

In 2009, Reverend Billy ran against the incumbent Michael Bloomberg for the position of mayor of New York City. In his analysis of Reverend Billy’s candidacy for mayor of New York, artist, activist, and scholar Larry Bogad inquires into the way that the mayoral run provides a human face to what some regard as the oligarchical tenure of the incumbent mayor, Michael Bloomberg. In 2009, Bloomberg orchestrated a legislative coup that extended term limits, allowing him to run for what looked like a virtually uncontested third term. Reverend Billy attempted to channel the feeling of political resignation and outrage among many New Yorkers with a platform built on principles that ranged from satirical, absurdist propositions, to pragmatic alternatives to Bloomberg’s regime. Referring to the strategy of intervening electoral politics, Bogad coins the phrase “electoral guerilla theatre,” a term that refers to “an ambivalent, hybrid measure that merges the traditions and techniques of ‘third-party’ electoral intervention with grassroots direct action and performative disruption.” Bogad notes: “Electoral guerilla theatre is often an expression of the frustration felt by individual citizens and social movements who feel excluded from the real decision-making process in current democracies.” Powerful are those projects that afford the framework for sensing political and individual agency anew.

Bogad also considers the often-posed critique that contestatory projects intervening governmental (statist) systems frivolously “waste” taxpayer’s dollars, and alienate an already-disillusioned voter base:

[...] What does this phenomenon reveal about voter frustration and dissatisfaction across a range of political systems and nationalities? Do these satirists pollute and abuse the electoral discourse and system, wasting public resources and media time with their outrageous performances, or is this “offensiveness” necessary for galvanizing marginalized communities? While many people in developing nations still struggle for the right to vote, is this primarily “developed nation” phenomenon just another appalling symptom of political disillusionment and cynicism in post-industrial democracies, or is it an unexpectedly constructive response, an innovative method of political engagement?

In response, Bogad suggests that a cost-benefit analysis overlooks the function of these cultural expressions in galvanizing a social movement/base through carnivalesque expression.

Winning office is rarely the primary goal. Rather, these campaigns usually aim to simultaneously corrode and rejuvenate different elements of the civic body, much like the degrading and regenerative aspects of Rabelasian carnival [...] They satirize the dominant political center, and expose its

unacknowledged exclusionary divides and ritualistic nature [...] This can create a moment of theatricality in the public sphere, disrupting assumptions of dignity, fairness, and legitimacy[...] At the same time, these campaigns echo, entertain, and energize the performer's base community(ies), and communicate grievances from that marginal position to the center through parody and irony.

In fact, many of the projects included in this book emblemize one of the unique characteristics of embedded art practices—an inclusive approach to authorship that shifts emphasis from originary creation to participation. Artist Darren O'Donnell foregrounds the blurred distinction between audience and participant with projects such as the one featured in this volume entitled “Children’s Choice Awards.” Artist and engineer Steve Mann’s notion of “incidentalism” encapsulates his approach to creating works that engender the participation of individuals in those institutions he encounters. Camille Turner’s invented beauty pageant persona mocks the institutionalization of beauty, and invites others to create their own set of criteria.

Kristin Lucas is an artist who officially changed her name from Kristin Lucas to Kristin Lucas (same spelling). In her discussion with the court judge she likened her experience to that of a web page: when you look at a web page, you are seeing the data that is assigned to it by a server. If you hit the “refresh” button on your keyboard but nothing on the server has changed, then what is seen on the screen appears to be the same, but, in fact, this is a whole new set of data retrieved from the server. Analogously, Lucas felt that she was the same person but in a new place in her life. The court transcript is disarmingly intimate, registers that the judge (and by extension the court) gave a lot of thought to the philosophical question about the power of naming that her project posed. The judge, then, became her unwitting or half-complicit collaborator whose participation, in fact, made the project possible.

In an excursus on the name, Jean-François Lyotard writes that proper names are “a metaphysical exigency and illusion,” but that nonetheless, they function as stabilizers that enable cognition: “[...] names must be proper, an object in the world must answer without an possible error to its call (appellation) in language. Otherwise,” he concludes, “how would true cognition be possible?” Lucas’ project can be seen as an artistic response to this question of *what happens* to truth when this cognitive chain is ruptured—a consideration of alternate systems of truth or meaning.

Similar in strategy and its capacity to loosen the ties between the signifier (reference) and signified (referent), the “Janez Janša” project was conceived in 2007 when three artists living in Ljubljana each changed their name to “Janez Janša,” the name of the incumbent centrist Slovenian prime minister who was running for re-election. When asked why they had changed their names to “Janez Janša,” each replied that it was for “personal reasons.” Absenting from explication, the media and general population was forced to interpret the artistic gesture themselves. By enscripting the media as constitutive producers of the work, the project rapidly propagated through the media, and through quotidian conversations. Several critics even maintained that the “Janez Janša” project “does not exist outside the media at all.” One critic noted, “Incidentally, the journalist always co-creates the event about which s/he reports, however, while this aspect of the journalist’s creativity usually remains hidden and

unthematized, it becomes explicit in the case of the Janša's project.”

As in the “Janez Janša” project, authorship in embedded art practices is not contained nor delimited, but instead, arrogated throughout the system, implicating endlessly with the project's continual morphogenesis. The artist does not occupy a fixed place, but figures instead as the canal, the stream of transmission, the channel, the circuit, pipe, or conduit—that strategic place between. Serres clarifies the distinction between an originary producer and the parasite:

The producer plays the contents, the parasite, the position. He who plays the position will always beat the one who plays the contents. The latter is simple and naïve; the former is complex and mediatized. The parasite always beats the producer... The one who plays the position plays the relations between subjects; thus, he masters men. And the master of men is the master of the masters of the world... To play the position or to play the location is to dominate the relation. It is to have a relation only with the relation itself. And that is the meaning of the prefix *para-* in the word *parasite*: it is on the side, next to, shifted; it is not on the thing, but on its relation. It has relations, as they say, and makes a system of them. It is always mediate and never immediate. It has a relation to the relation, a tie to the tie; it branches onto the canal.

In other words, for Serres, the parasite does not operate from a singular vantage, but as the system as a whole in constant movement. Cary Wolfe points out that for Serres, “this parasitic cascade, the chain, or what he sometimes calls the arrow of ongoing movement of parasitic relations, forms the ur-dynamic of social and cultural relations.” Embedded practices thus signify from contextual and relational shifts over time; they move an understanding of historical consequence from one that is linear and repetitive towards one that is dynamically and topologically determined. Within this paradigm, adjacency and incidence weigh more heavily than consecutive patterning; an emphasis on contingency and asynchronicity keeps in check the overdetermination of effect. Embedded, the artist produces on a small scale, but with a mindfulness towards what artist John Latham might see as “the enormous butterfly-effect-like possibilities over time.”

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Bogad: Oh! Maybe it's kind of like the notion of *social camouflage!*

Marisa: What exactly do you mean by that?

Bogad: I mean when an excluded actor cannily manipulates the dominant signs of dress, address, compartment, and identity in order to move more easily through what would otherwise be an exclusionary or forbidden social space. This is easier for some than others, of course. The Yes Men simply put on thrift store suits; their shorthaired, white maleness affords them access to corporate events that easily. But for Camille Turner, a black female, to gain access to such spaces, she must enact a more inventive and creative transformation into the fantastic, fabulous Miss Canadiana. In a racist and sexist society, it is more of a fantasy that Camille would be invited to attend such events, especially as an honoured guest; hence the use of fantasia to get a "pass." But what would Žižek or Deleuze and Guattari say to that?

Narrator: Ahem. May I direct your attention back to the primary text above?

Bogad: Wait... Is the parasite ingested by the host, or does the parasite ingest little cells of the host, feeding off of some of its internal cells/tissues? Or both?

Marisa: Well, it's both... both activities happen at the same time.

Bogad: Thanks... also, do we have to stay down here?

Marisa: You mean, cramped up in here with the footnotes?

Bogad: Yeah. This font is kind of small.

Marisa: Oh, well we are free to get up in the main narrative whenever we want! Here, let's go in.

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