

Excerpts from a guide to etiquette for international curators and artists:

Always:

Make some (preferably melancholy) reference to the inevitability of globalization and the market.

Never:

Make the actual, social and economic practices of the art world visible to the public.

Always:

Make use of too little or too much information whenever non-art world or local content is required.

Never:

Make the political content or local issue too serious; and never be accused of didacticism.

Always:

Wear Prada and Vivienne Westwood attire.

## **HOW TO BEST SERVE THE NEW GLOBAL CONTEMPORARY ART MATRIX**

Gregory G. Sholette, February, 2000

In spite of the irony of my title, the theme of this paper is the dematerialization of local cultures and histories by an emerging global art industry. The rapid circulation of something called *contemporary art*—not just as a specific set of practices but as a “liquifiable asset”<sup>1</sup>—is the value this global industry produces. However my approach to this topic is not direct. Instead I reflect on my experiences in the contemporary art world and use this as a way of framing my arguments about the global circulation of culture. Two of these three brief “studies” reveal how one is supposed to behave toward the new global art phenomena and the third proposes a way of “misbehaving.”

I begin by discussing the transformation of two “alternative” spaces that were founded in the 1970s in New York City. One of these is the New Museum of Contemporary Art where I worked as the Curator of Education from 1997 to 1998. The second is the space known as PS1. Both institutions were originally part of a movement that criticized the official art museum and its practice of embalming art and artists apart from contemporary aspects of life. Both the New Museum and PS1 have recently reinvented themselves, changing both their physical and conceptual appearance. These make-overs includes new galleries and interior spaces. It also includes a new image that retains the demeanor of a critical distance from the official art museum. However it is my argument that what these re-made

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<sup>1</sup> I have outlined some aspects of this interpretation of global culture in my essay “Counting on your Collective Silence: Notes on Activist Art as Collaborative Practice” that was published in the November/December 1999 issue of the media journal *Afterimage*. I am also borrowing upon observations made by the sociologist Saskia Sassen in a paper presented on “New Internationalism” for the *Carnegie International Conference on Contemporary Art*, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2000, at the University of Pittsburgh, USA

spaces aspire to actually lie elsewhere. What they share is a desire to become shareholders in the evolving matrix known as international contemporary art.

The second example I will present is a public art and mapping project that I conceptualized for the REPOhistory collective in New York City. Appropriately entitled *Circulation*, this project suggests a possible counter-practice to the global, contemporary art matrix. Ostensibly *Circulation* is about the geopolitics of human blood. At the same time the project is a critique of the public sphere and current art practices. *Circulation* steps out of the hermetic redundancy of much contemporary art by encouraging artists and non-artists, educators and activists to engage REPOhistory using the new technology of the Internet as well as through older mechanisms including the postal system and street art. In this way *Circulation* seeks a partial contagion of that other circulatory system known as contemporary global culture.

In order to be useful, the narratives that follow must be read against the larger scenario called "globalization." In particular this means the impact of the international art market on local forms of art and culture. Let me begin with a provisional definition of this new "internationalism." The globalization of culture is the process by which specific local customs, art practices, forms of knowledge, identities and even cuisine are broken down and then selectively drawn up into a transnational, circulatory system that parallels the "floating" value of international capital. This "liquefaction" and circulation of local assets appears, according to sociologist Saskia Sassen, to have a life of its own. It also seems to have little or no physical existence. If digital technology is the principal medium of this worldwide financial circuitry it is also the dominant metaphor used to describe globalization. In a sense the metaphor is the medium and visa versa. Strangely, the immediate appearance of this new global imaginary space resembles the collage aesthetic of early modernism. In the circulating ether of mass media that includes television, commercial cinema, the Internet and advertising, what was once localized and historical is now a string of fragmented images and dismembered texts that are juxtaposed within a buoyant and ambiguous space. Nor has this virtual weightlessness stopped short of infecting the realm of so called "high art" or museum culture. The spreading of what independent curator Rachel Weiss has termed "the biennial virus," together with the massive replication of contemporary art centers and museums in both hemispheres provides the necessary structural grid for this global contemporary art matrix.

What seems common to all forms of global dematerialization is the way broken up particles of the world, including national, ethnic and local cultures are encouraged to collide and produce transitory new meanings, but are not however permitted to retain an active connection to any specific history or place. In other words what grounds this circulation are indeed actual institutions and specific exhibitions but which nevertheless resemble one another more than they do any actual culture, community, or history. Perhaps Fredric Jameson's description of postmodernism as a "surrealism without the unconscious," is a useful way of thinking about the new global contemporary art matrix. Yet this articulated circuitry does in fact have a referent even if it is an equally intangible one. The referent for the global contemporary art matrix is the international network of monetary transactions known as international capital that moves at high speed, twenty four hours a day, and seven days a week. Still the velocity of such transactions requires a string of local sites that can negotiate and regulate the shifting value of this currency. My assumption is, following Sassen, that the value of "stock" in global contemporary art is regulated by the increasing number of art centers, art fairs, and biennials as well as the discourse that surrounds them. My argument starts with several institutions previously founded on an open hostility to this very commodity culture but who have now slipped effortlessly into the role of a local trading post for this international aesthetic capital.

## **From imaginary alternative practice to the global imaginary: the new, New Museum**

Upon first inspection, the global contemporary art matrix reveals a surface dotted with a discourse of social reform. Distantly linked to the 1960's counter culture, some of this art aggressively promotes sexual freedom for women, for gays and lesbians. Some alludes to such things as the plywood shacks of homeless persons. And some even encourages viewers to read critical theory in conjunction with images of crashed airplanes, famine and terrorism. Ironically it is not uncommon to discover that international curators will, in all sincerity, feel an obligation to critique the dominion of the market and its negative impact on local cultures. However, when such criticism is made it often takes on a resigned and melancholy tone in which the apparent death of real opposition is presented as inevitable and mourning serves as the only possible response for the mature intellectual.

My aim is not to re-play these sentiments for other ends by lamenting an innocence now lost: either that of some mythical alternative space or the counter culture itself. Rather, I hope to offer an interpretation in which recent changes in two New York art institutions—the New Museum of Contemporary Art and PS1: Institute for Art and Urban Resources—are understood as part of a larger transformation within the arena called contemporary art. I will begin with some examples I encountered regarding the changing managerial approach of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City, followed by a reading of the physical reinvention of both the New Museum's space and its graphic identity as well as the renovation of PS1.

The New Museum's founder and long-time director Marcia Tucker opened her space in 1977 on 14th Street in New York City. The museum—which has no permanent collection and is therefore more of a kunsthalle than an actual “museum”—later moved to its current location on lower Broadway in the late 1980s. From the beginning the New Museum's mission drew inspiration from the idealism of the Civil Rights, Anti-War and Feminist movements. These sentiments were translated into an outspoken concern for the active popularizing of contemporary art (art made by living artists,) as well as an exploration of alternative means for managing the workings of the institution itself. On the cusp of the kitsch populism of the East Village art scene in the early 1980s, the New Museum filled a public need for making works of art accessible and less formal and more fun. Exhibitions entitled “Bad Paintings,” followed later by “Bad Girls” and “Carnival Knowledge” presented sentimental imagery, exhortations about sexual freedom and feminist politics.

These ideas extended to the presentation of art as well. For example the New Museum's security staff once served as the sole interpreters of works in one display and on another occasion the public was encouraged to write about their art experience and pin these ideas up on the museum wall<sup>2</sup>. As late as 1991 the museum's mission stated that:

“The New Museum is committed to an ongoing investigation of what art is and how it relates to individuals and to society at large, and focuses primarily on art that lies outside of the mainstream, that is of an experimental or nontraditional

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<sup>2</sup> Security staff served as interpreters in the 1993 exhibition “The Spatial Drive” curated by Laura Trippi. The viewer was actively adding comments to the show “Rhetorical Image” organized by Julie Ault and the New Museum Education Department in 1991.

nature, or that might not otherwise have a venue... The Museum is also committed to an investigation of itself as an institution.”<sup>3</sup>

By the time I arrived at the museum in the fall of 1997 as its third Curator of Education, a process of professionalizing, or perhaps a better word is disciplining, the old New Museum had already begun. This operation was occurring at every level of the institution including the organizational structure as well as its physical spaces. Nevertheless, still haunting the museum were the remnants of the institution's past as an "alternative space." One of these ghosts was a style of management called Participatory Management. Just prior to my arrival the museum held regular meetings in which everyone, from curators and administrators to museum guards and cleaning staff gathered to discuss not only issues of management, but also the conceptual direction of the museum's programming. Yet by the start of my tenure these meetings had become less participatory and more "business-like." The curators seldom attended and most meetings involved management issues about security and building maintenance. Similar changes took place in the planning of public programs. At one time discussions about upcoming exhibitions, screenings and performances, were structured in the same participatory meeting style. These participatory programming meetings would often get bogged down in torturous discussions as people with different levels of training and technical skills debated the worth of an idea.

Certainly the physical expansion of the museum contributed new financial and management burdens. Simultaneously, a growing staff and larger operation made full participation in programming very time-consuming. This, along with deep cuts in federal spending to the arts from the late 1980s onward put added pressure on so-called alternative spaces to become more financially independent and helped undermine their former idealism. Nevertheless the old New Museum always promoted one particularly unique idea: that educators and curators would work closely together in shaping the public presentation of contemporary art exhibitions and programs.

“It is our belief that museum education is not a separate enterprise which uses interpretive and didactic material to explain exhibitions, but is built into the very aspect of the Museum's function and mandate.” (NM 1991)

Indeed the New Museum may have even been the first to use the term “Curator of Education” precisely in order to boost the status of the education department. If the curator is concerned with the integrity of the object or installation as well as the voice of the artist, it is the educator's job to engage non-professionals and diverse audiences in the meaning and value of contemporary art. In theory, the combination of these outlooks was the mission of the New Museum of Contemporary Art. In practice, this fragile yet significant form of collaborative experimentation had dissolved prior to my arrival. While informal discussions about exhibitions continued across departmental lines, the more radical notion of an exchange of ideas or an interdisciplinary collaboration on new projects was no longer "on the table."

The actual appearance and public image of the New Museum following its renovation remarkably echo these administrative changes. For years the museum had made due with a single, elongated gallery space. In 1998 the Museum added two additional exhibition spaces and remodeled the one existing gallery. Its graphic identity was also redesigned and new offices were built upstairs while a book and gift shop was constructed in the basement level. Here I will focus primarily on the alterations made to

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<sup>3</sup> All quotes are from The New Museum of Contemporary Art's annual report of 1990-1991.

the entrance and windows of the museum because these most clearly reflect the imaginary of global contemporary art.

The new design has literally opened up the old space and entrance to the Museum producing a large reception area that is vertically transected by a set of stairs. The stairs are arranged so the observer, upon entering the space can immediately perceive the increased assets of the museum. By looking down one glimpses the renovated basement and gift shop, by looking up a new mezzanine is partially visible behind a perforated metal screen. Beyond this entrance the actual gallery spaces are still long and narrow and, just as before, not at all easy to curate. What is most apparent therefore in this remodeled entrance is the display of space itself.

Effectively, the renovated entrance advertises the new, New Museum as a site designed for something called contemporary art, as distinct from its former presence as retro-fit edifice defined by its opposition to the conventional idea of the museum. This may seem like a meaningless contrast unless we bear in mind that with the emergence of the global contemporary art market all local specificity is broken down, or liquefied, into a circulating asset. In the case of the old New Museum, its specific location was one of negation as well as advocacy for living artists. This is expressed in the 1991 mission as "The New Museum remains critical of its own function. We persist in raising difficult questions about our role as an institution..." However dysfunctional that "self-critical" position may have eventually become, by its very impurity the New Museum's dual role of "anti-museum" and pro-living artist, resisted easy absorption into the market. Obviously, to become part of the global contemporary art matrix the anti-institutional side of the mission had to be expunged. However, before pursuing this I want to continue our tour of the new, New Museum.

Significantly, much of this new "spaciousness" is visible from just outside the entrance. From the sidewalk a passerby can look directly through the large picture windows on the ground floor and observe the same display of abundant spaces. However, it is from this sidewalk viewpoint that the past now imposes itself on this discussion. Since its inception the museum always used its street level windows as programmed exhibition space. For 25 years artists proposed work specifically to be installed in these windows which in turn became a space for experiencing new art in a public setting. Indeed, pedestrians passing by the windows did not have to enter the museum to see art. At times the street viewer may not even have known that this was "art" since the museum and the windows worked independently of each other. Several advantages were gained by this ambiguity. For one thing, the intimidation factor typically associated with museums and galleries was defused. Another advantage was the way these window spaces allowed artists with social or political concerns to enter the public sphere and, at least in theory, directly engage fellow citizens about issues in the real world (as opposed to the art world.) Returning to the renovated New Museum we find that while the windows have remained, art installations are no longer being designed for this space. Instead the windows are fully integrated into the museum and its new facade. They now function as windows normally do, as a visual advertisement for the museum as museum, for itself.

To sharpen my argument, consider one of the most powerful and best known of the pedagogical window installations. In November of 1987 the AIDS activist group Act Up was invited by curator Bill Olander to design an installation for the New Museum windows. Thirty or so people, and not all of them artists, chose to enlarge and expand upon Act Up's well-known agitational slogan: Silence=Death. Using pink neon lights and photographs the window included images of Ronald Reagan, Jessie Helms, Jerry Falwell and other members of the American far

right who had actively opposed the treatment of the disease. Entitled *Let the Record Show* the installation also included an electronic sign regularly updating viewers about the number of people who died of AIDS. As Richard Meyer remarks in his essay *This Is to Enrage You: Gran Fury and the Graphics of AIDS Activism*:

“ Although *Let the Record Show* was sponsored by the New Museum, it became, by dint of its placement in an exterior window on lower Broadway, part of the sidewalk culture of a heavily commercial block in downtown Manhattan. This liminal location—at once inside an art space and extending into the public sphere of the city street—became an influential model for later AIDS activist work.”<sup>4</sup>

Today the museum exhibits a very different set of signs at its entrance. Just inside the new lobby is the metamorphosed New Museum logo. Printed in lowercase, apple green and black letters it is hung like a billboard just above the reception desk, (The same apple green color and lower case typestyle used for the new logo are also found in all of the signage and printed materials produced by the museum.) The new logo literally condenses the older, more discursive and argumentative phrase “The New Museum” into a single, sweeping grapheme. It eliminates the word 'The' in the old identity producing a stylized treatment of the remaining words 'new' and 'museum' and forming the merged logotype 'newmuseum,' with the 'museum' part printed upside down and backwards. Compared to the original letterhead, this truncated and compressed *newmuseum* mark is like the graphic equivalent of a sound bite, and not unlike corporate identities such as *DaimlerChrysler*, *Citibank*, or *etoy*.

The new logo is also extremely elastic in terms of application: for example in the downstairs gift shop one finds the logo readily applied to T-shirts, book bags and baseball caps. Quickly grasped and incessantly repeatable, the new, more elegant image expresses a self-awareness of corporate design as a key to strong marketing in the global public sphere. Similar issues of what we might call image cleansing can be raised around the expunging of a web-site designed by the Education Department. The aim of the education Web-Site was to directly engage youth culture, a constituency that a previous Curator of Education, Brian Goldfarb, had cultivated. Visually playful, the site resembled an on-line zine and was radically different than the museum's home web pages, which were and are still conventional and brochure-like in format. However, the site never went on-line. Today the New Museum Education Department web site, known as the Visible Knowledge Program, basically conforms to the museum's other web pages. Although clear and well designed they nevertheless take no risks in either form or content, both of which would have been the occasion to experiment during the so-called alternative space movement of the 1970s and early 1980s.

The idea of an "alternative space" may indeed be outgrown or perhaps outmaneuvered for some time now. Yet the frictionless slide that appears to be taking place whereby a truculent and unwieldy resistance mutates into a global corporate sensibility should not go un-remarked. Amazingly, the new, New Museum is simply unburdened by this conflict. For however challenging the problems faced by these institutions of late, the decision to become more business-like and “professional” reflects a clear ideological shift. This shift is one that seeks to shed the experimental; counter-institutional as well as local-political and cultural concerns that initiated the New Museum (and PS1.) As the new logotype clearly communicates, along with announcing a willingness to leave behind the connotation of

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Meyer “This Is to Enrage You: Gran Fury and the Graphics of AIDS Activism,” from the book *But Is It Art: The Spirit of Art as Activism*, ed Nina Felshin, Seattle: Bay Press, 1995, pg 64.

"alternative space" the new, New Museum explicitly signals to those of us with the ability to remember that this "willful forgetting" is the only available option.

This active amnesia is in no way limited to the New Museum. Consider the marriage between a recently renovated PS1 and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. In retrospect the well-publicized renovation of the former public school building in Queens appears to be part of the seduction that led directly to the alter-place. However what the actual events were that brought PS1—perhaps the best known "alternative spaces" in the world—together with the matriarch of modernism, is less important here than the fact that such a union is possible in the first place. On one side of the aisle there is the pioneering cultural space, publicly known for its support of working artists and one of the institutions associated with the rise of installation art and even post-modernism. On the other side is the MoMA, historically not a friendly venue for living artists and certainly well invested in the canon of the dead, genius maker of collectible objects known as high modernism.

In retrospect the overture to this affair was certainly the multi-million dollar renovation of PS1 itself. The architects transformed what had been a labyrinth of crumbling hallways, classrooms, boiler rooms and basements into a simulacrum of crumbling hallways, classrooms, boiler rooms and basements. If the old PS1 was a space where artists often got away with anything, the new PS1 still poses as unrestrained, but is in actuality more manageable and therefore more easily converted into a marketable asset. Like their larger establishment siblings the Guggenheim and MoMA, it appears to be the desire of the new PS1 and New Museum to be viewed as a local anchor for the aesthetic currency circulated within global biennials, art fairs, and international exhibitions called "contemporary art."

## **Against Aesthetic Cleansing**

The need to index the value of this circulating, global aesthetic capital produces several strange effects. One of these is an inversion of speed and mass in which the faster international art travels from venue to venue, the more space, labor and materials are required and the more theoretical writing generated. Some of these installation works for example are comprised of thousands of feet of crumpled aluminum foil; vats filled with sliced animal parts, full size replications of fire trucks and even entire sections of buildings. Increased shipping and insurance costs as well as hundreds of thousands of dollars in start-up money further amplify the sense of weight exuded by these projects for many of these projects. Indeed, some of these installations do reflect concerns about the political and social world beyond the art market. Some even attempt to disrupt the global matrix itself by producing work that defies categories or is made of overtly worthless materials. Yet the global aesthetic matrix establishes the actual pattern of circulation as well as the level of disruption it can tolerate at any given juncture. If anything this circulating endowment is becoming ever more defined and routine as a familiar stock of artists and their installations reappear in places such as Kassel, Berlin, Johannesburg, Sao Palo, Pittsburgh, Melbourne, and Venice.

The melancholy that curators obligingly express towards a seemingly inevitable market domination—curiously by making reference to such things as Walter Benjamin's reflection on the Angel of History—is echoed by art works that attempt a political engagement with the

market, but end-up once again re-inscribing the ubiquity of global capital.<sup>5</sup> As long as the preferred approach to self-critical engagement by the international artist or curator remains one in which it is the rules of art itself that are challenged and exposed, the chances of any actual destabilization in the global aesthetic matrix are nil. The more this "critical" practice tries to evade traditional definitions of aesthetics while remaining within the circulatory path of the global art market, the more it serves as grease for the very thing called contemporary art. Which is not to suggest that work ignored by the contemporary art matrix is inherently resistant. On the contrary. Without a great deal of artistic "dark matter"—that enormous production of work that remains largely invisible yet exerts a specific counter force to the market—the entire industry called the art would instantaneously collapse.

Where resistance to the hegemony of global contemporary art is possible and appears to be successful is in those projects that move in between disciplines while remaining embedded in a specific set of political-ethical concerns not circumscribed by contemporary art discourse or traditional exhibition practices. Among these "undisciplined" conduits in the United States are inter-media activists @TMark, *MediaFilter*, the band *Negativland*, and *Paper Tiger Television* (which describes its mission as "Smashing the Myths of the Information Industry,") as well as numerous pirate radio and television stations operating on line and underground. Other organized or semi-organized institutions include *Temporary Services* in Chicago, *ABC No Rio* in New York City, the Critical Art Ensemble in Pittsburgh, and the *Center for Land Use Interpretation* in Los Angeles which is "Dedicated to the increase and diffusion of information about how the world's lands are apportioned, utilized and perceived." There are also European groups like *a-clip*, *Monitor Label fuer fluechtige Medien* and one could add curatorial endeavors like the group *Nomads and Residents*, or exhibitions such as *Global Conceptualism* by Rachel Weiss, Jane Farber and Luis Cammitzer or *We Are Somewhere Else Already* by Annette Schindler and Florian Zeyfang or the curatorial projects of Julie Ault. Still another practice is that of REPOhistory. Based in New York City, REPOhistory is an organization that I have a long-term, personal investment in, but, at the risk of great immodesty, will now discuss as part of my concluding comments about the new global museum and the contemporary art matrix.

REPOhistory's inaugural meeting took place in May of 1989 when a dozen people gathered in response to a three-page proposal I distributed that was loosely based on "Points of Reference," a 1988 public art project public in Graz Austria organized by Werner Fenz. "Points of Reference" consisted of fourteen site specific installations revealing the cities now invisible Nazi past. My re-tailored proposal called on New York artists to "retrieve and relocate absent historical narratives at specific locations in New York City through counter monuments, actions, and events." Instead of exposing a hidden fascist history, the group's regular dozen members and dozens of collaborators have instead over the last ten years produced six public art projects and two large gallery installations in which the invisible historical and political contours of a given place are marked and mapped. The group has used publicly installed artist-designed street signs on city lamp posts to mark such sites as the city's first slave market, the shape of the islands pre-Columbian coast line, the inaugural demonstration by the AIDS activist group Act Up, the location of several recent shootings of innocent people by New York City Police, the historic visit by Nelson Mandela to New York in 1990, the site where a famous 19th century abortionist's offices once stood, and the setting for an alleged slave rebellion against the

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<sup>5</sup> Perhaps we should consider replacing Benjamin's use of Paul Klee's Angel of History from his final essay *Thesis on the Philosophy of History* with the figure of the cocktail party host and replace the wreckage at the angel's feet with the numerous and well intended "deconstructions" of the art commodity?

Dutch in 1741. All together REPOhistory has "repossessed" over 60 such sites in New York City and elsewhere.

As a collective of artists, teachers, and activists, the group literally operates in-between the disciplines of visual art, urban activism, social history, and radical pedagogy. Disconnected from the mainstream art world, the majority of public recognition REPOhistory has received is in mass circulation newspapers including the New York Times and the Village Voice. This movement outside of the parameters of the art industry is certainly due in part to the group's composition as much as its politics and preferred field of operation in public space. The name REPOhistory itself is salvaged from popular culture rather than high art. It is a spin on the 1984 cult film "Repo Man" in which several socially marginalized characters are employed to steal back the property of working people who fall behind in their payments. As contemptible as repo-men are, they inadvertently expose the narrow corridor between an illusion of ownership in "the system" and the actuality of debt. Similarly, "REPOhistorians" work the gap between official history, and a re-reading of the past overlapping narratives, forgotten figures, and repressed events.

With *Circulation*, the group's current project, REPOhistory approaches the island of Manhattan itself as a specific site, one that contains a matrix of partially detectable systems that shape its physical and discursive topography. Along with water and electricity, subways and sewers, zoning regulations and taxes, there is one system that may be as invisible as it is vital: this is the daily routine of collecting, processing and distributing hundreds of pints of human blood each day. Blood is drawn from a pool of voluntary donors, delivered to blood-banks, processed and dispersed to hospitals and clinics around the city and region. Used or polluted blood is even excreted out of the system via the Bronx to disposal sites north of the city and beyond. Blood's civic vitality is conveyed in the statistic that nine out of ten New Yorkers who reach the age of 72 have received a blood transfusion. In short, the objective of REPOhistory's latest mapping project is to reveal the unknown history and material topography of blood. It does so by proposing that an informed citizenry learn to "read" the body not solely as a natural, biological thing, but as a specific historical site layered in social meaning and cultural significance. The various works and projects that make up *Circulation* become one possible map revealing the restless movement of this organ, human blood, as it travels through the physical and social spaces of Manhattan's urban anatomy.

*Circulation* is also different than past projects in that it dispenses with REPOhistory's customary street signs, substituting instead a collection of artist-designed images and texts distributed through the mail, over the Internet, and at specific sites in art galleries and in the streets. Along with hundreds of mail artworks the project includes small objects, magnets, stickers and a map of Manhattan detailing the movement of blood through the city as well as a short history of blood excavated by the collective for this project. *Circulation* also encompasses a window installation at Printed Matter Bookstore; a performance piece entitled "Flow" and an interactive web site <[www.repohistory.org](http://www.repohistory.org)> that remains on-line after the project's other elements are disseminated. The *Circulation* web functions like the projects "digital heart" by pumping images, texts, data and ideas through an array of electronic arteries. The project also features two collaborations made with groups of New York City public high students including <<http://www.thebleedingedge.org>> which is an on-line zine that features "Blood for Beginners" an illustrated dictionary and "Red-Time Stories" all produced by students in grades 6 through 11 at the Institute for Collaborative Education. A second project at City As School involves a series

of video interviews about the selling of blood for yarn; a case of baby switching caught by DNA tests, the culture of vampirism, and contracting hepatitis from raw oysters.<sup>6</sup>

An important aspect of *Circulation* is to map the evolving perception and social meaning of blood and the circulatory system including its effect on everyday life. In this sense REPOhistory insists on an artistic practice that extends beyond the margins of "contemporary art." For example the project points out that David Harvey's famous "discovery" of blood circulation in 1628 later influenced such people as Adam Smith whose *Wealth of Nations* (1776) applied Harvey's ideas of blood circulation to the circulation of capital. At about this time Enlightenment urban planners consciously used the model of the circulatory system of heart, lungs, arteries and veins to design streets and boulevards in France and the United States. Closer to our own time the perception of blood has undergone dramatic alteration leading to a virtual paradox of signification. In the post-AIDS context blood is often perceived as both a medium of healing and a source of deadly pathogens. One outcome of this ambivalence is the misplaced fears by potential donors of becoming contaminated with the HIV virus. This has led in turn to extreme shortages in many regional blood supplies even as the demand for blood products increases.

Other contradictions persist. For example blood is often invoked as a symbol of fraternity; at the same time, it has served as an imaginary physiological dividing line that segregates people of different colors, classes, cultural backgrounds and nationalities. The social violence accompanying these ideological exclusions finds its expression in overt forms of racism in the U.S. like the Ku Klux Klan or Aryan Nations as well as the invisible legal mechanisms of the state itself. One need only look at the disproportionate percentage of African Americans on death row to see the ongoing destructive legacy of outmoded ideas like "racial types." Certainly the most infamous of these false "scientific" notions surrounding blood classification was developed by the National Socialist Party in the 1930's. On March 14, 1933 Germany passed a law aimed at the "cultivation of heredity and race." This law officially took effect in Austria on January 1, 1940. Known as the "Law to Prevent Offspring with Hereditary Disease" it called for the obligatory sterilization of "Untermenschen" which included Gypsies, Jews, Slavs as well as homosexuals and the handicapped.<sup>7</sup>

Today the circulatory system, its blood cells and plasma, are used as the portals through which powerful new technologies of commerce, healing, and social control are being tested and refined. Important medical breakthroughs capable of improving lives have resulted from this

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<sup>6</sup> *Circulation* is dedicated to the late Edward Eisenberg. *Circulation* conception and direction is by myself, with Janet Koenig (research and design of project map,) Jim Costanzo (web site design,) and Tom Klen (project co-direction.) Participating artists include: Carola Burroughs, Keith Christensen, Sharon Denning, Brian Hand, Russet Lederman, Cynthia Liesenfeld, Ken Ficara, Jasmine Gartner, Lisa Hecht, Andre Knight, Ivan Navarro, Meryl Meisler, John Menick, Jayne Pagnucco, Marilyn Perez, Chris Pietrapiana, Jenny Polak, Kevin Pyle, Leela Ramotar, Miguelangel Ruiz, David Sansone, Trebor Scholz, Jenni Sorkin, George Spencer, Oscar Tuazon, Sarah Vogwil, and Anna Wagner-Ott with the students of St Cloud University MN.

<sup>7</sup> I am basing this information on the Mauthausen Concentration Camp Memorial exhibition text that is available on-line at <http://www.mauthausen-memorial.gv.at/engl/index.html>. It is important to add that the sterilization (but not execution) of the mentally "inferior" was also widespread in California and New York from the turn of the century onwards. By 1920 some 3,233 sterilizations of the mentally unfit had been performed in the United States alone as well as many other American States and were based on similar bogus ideas of "hygenics." Stories about recent or ongoing sterilization practices in Latin America continue to appear in the press. )

experimentation. However, the race amongst governmental and private interests to map the entire human genetic sequence has already resulted in companies such as Millennium Pharmaceuticals Inc. that license recipes for human genes on a pay per use basis.

The history of medicine is both remarkable and filled with dark episodes. It has often involved the unethical targeting of the poor and marginalized. One example is the infamous Tuskegee experiments in the 1930s in the Southern United States in which syphilis infected African Americans were purposely not treated for the disease and instead studied like lab animals. Another hidden history started after the testing of the first atomic bomb when the government began secret tests on unsuspecting hospital patients. The subjects were again low income and often persons of color, including women and children. The victims received injections of radioactive plutonium and for years were observed by doctors sworn to "do no harm." Despite the way language sometimes playfully and sometimes grimly modulates the public's perception of blood, it is physical hardships and individual profits that continue to structure its changing narrative. Mapping aspect of this modulating topography at a particular moment and place is the aim of *Circulation*.

If REPOhistory offers a different kind of circulatory system, it is one that sharply contrasts with that of the global contemporary art matrix. REPOhistory purposely seeks to pollute the imagined purity of contemporary art and invites you to assist in this dirtying-up of the global matrix through the project's Web Site, maps and post-cards. By moving in-between the well-guarded boundaries surrounding art and history, pedagogy and political activism, and by injecting into the hermetic discourse of art a specific set of actual experiences, technologies and politics, *Circulation* proposes one way of resisting the coming aesthetic cleansing.

Let me close by amending the opening excerpts taken from the "guide to etiquette for international curators and artists." First, always do use your (privileged) access to information and ability to communicate to reach a non-art world population, even if this means you are accused of didacticism. Second, whenever possible, make visible the actual social and economic practices of the emerging global contemporary art matrix to that population. Do this as a way of actively remembering. And if you still really want to wear Prada and Westwood, just go ahead.