

Thematics

DIY

Do it yourself

The reinvestment in DIY as an operating concept by a new generation of artists allows us to shed light on fresh perspectives for contemporary critical thought.

DIY is searching to infiltrate spaces where social and political identities become unstable and their borders unclear.

DIY realizes itself through small, practical experiments, step by step, moment by moment. Its aim is to generate ways of doing, procedures for acting in the real that produce momentums of disequilibrium, minor perturbations that challenge our conceptions and our way of experiencing the here and now.

Conversations with Joël Verwimp & Nicolas Y Galeazzi,
Heike Langsdorf, Lilia Mestre, NG, Bavo Olbrechts,
Piivi Porkoia and Elke Van Campenhout

DIY

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Thematics DIY ran from April 5 until May 31 2010 with Heike Langsdorf/radical_hope, Elke Van Campenhout & Aude Thensiau, Bavo Olbrechts,NG, and Nicolas Y Galeazzi & Joël Verwimp as artists in residence.

Thematics DIY was a project by Bains Connective, curated by Lilia Mestre/Bains Connective in collaboration with MicroMarché and a.pt/a.pass.

Bains Connective thanks the artists and partners.

Thematics Residency **DO IT YOURSELF**

an introduction by Cordie Stalberg

We can currently observe a multiplication in the number of artistic works experimenting with DIY approaches. Bains Connective decided to dedicate a pluridisciplinary residency to this theme, in order to explore in depth what a DIY ethics in art consists of. What are the questions that these practices confront us with, what are its tools for criticism and the aesthetic forms it proposes? To which position does it ultimately lead? Among the artists whose work refers to DIY philosophy, we can perceive a constellation of approaches, a diversity to which this residency wishes to respond by bringing together creators committed to very singular trajectories.

The residents of BC were hosted in the MicroMarché market hall, a DIY initiative that proposes an alternative economic space where artists can sell their creations. This peculiar space is characterized by its permeability, its semi-openness to the outside, which facilitates encounters with local people and the market's customers. It provided an opportunity for the artists to make interventions involving an eclectic public, and being in a market, to act on the border of different ways of framing issues such as autonomous economies and the instrumentalization of creativity.

One of the major concerns of the residency was how to find ways of 'doing' rooted in the micro-level that can generate potentialities for alternative narratives and challenge the status quo. How can we discover strategies to liberate ourselves from paralysis, to empower ourselves to act and induce change, however microscopic it is?

Heike Langsdorf researches possibilities for social change through a series of contextual performances that she leads, often involving public spaces. With an artistic attitude embodied by the character radical_hope, the artist proposes a kind of social ritual where changeability can be played with and rehearsed by audiences. At MicroMarché, Heike Langsdorf tested the idea of a Changing Room, offering passers-by the opportunity to spend a limited moment in a space. They were invited to suggest an action or remodel the space by moving the objects dispersed in the room and changing their functions. Heike Langsdorf sees her 'doing' as an artist as resembling the idea of 'being present'. As the curator/ cure-ator of the Changing Room, her role consisted of listening to what happened and taking care of what emerged at any given moment.

radical_hope creates environments where we can become conscious of our capacity to affect things, and how we can change ourselves through the very concrete act of transforming our immediate surroundings.

Through Critical Hope, Elke Van Campenhout takes a position against the instrumentalization of hope in current discourses on power. She advocates the necessity of formulating a contemporary analysis of hope, and develops out of it new tools to generate criticism and new perspectives for action. Not geared any more towards a distant future and disincarnated topos, it is by embedding hope in the here and now that it can regain its critical potential and effectiveness. Hope brings us then inevitably to the necessity of putting into question and redefining how we frame and take part in the relational field we are positioned in, and if we are willing to take the risk, to let ourselves be affected by others. In the words of Elke Van Campenhout, "A hopeful gesture is one that alters the situation: between you and me or between my environment and myself, and in that moment changes both of us." Through 'Blind Practices', she rediscovered space and relationships to the other out of the state of vulnerability induced by being blindfolded. With an air of candour, Bureau d'Espoir proposed strategies to make hope circulate through the city: sending out notes, interviewing passers-by and marking the social body by micro-interventions. Initiating practices where personal narratives on hope can be developed is also a very important aspect of this work, since a hopeful attitude allows us to become aware of the potential concealed in our everyday lives.

Visual artist Bavo Olbrechts cultivates an improvisational DIY aesthetic through his favouring of fast, easy techniques such as drawing and carpentry. With an economy of means, choosing simple materials like wood, Bavo builds temporary and precarious structures, and spatializes lines of thought that are schematic and concise. He has developed a playful attitude with his own work, together with a reflexive gaze upon the making process. The issues of self-actualization and autonomy are central to Bavo's artistic practice. It is about believing that one can follow one's own path and unfold its trajectory according to internal logic. The action of unfolding in its very concreteness is a theme that is very

central to Bavo's visual/performative practice.

Through the DIY approach, he also wants to undermine the imperative to produce that conditions the artistic process. He proposes acting outside this predetermined format: the moment where something should be shown becomes incidental, futile, and might eventually not take place at all. Primacy is given to the development of oneself through the working process, 'zelfbouw' – the construction of the self. This cannot be shown but has to be experienced. Bavo also distances himself from a notion of time structured by functionality through his fascination with empty time and processes that stretch until we reach boredom. In this regard, the endless and in some ways absurd journeys of lonely mountaineers or sailors inspire him, since they represent a pure expenditure of time.

Being in continual displacement is a strategy NG adopted to escape social constraints. She associates the fixity of dwelling with control, the colonization of our intimate choices and projects by preconceived living standards. Escaping this confinement becomes the beginning of an adventurous trajectory continuously widening horizons and exploring alternative ways of inhabiting the world, establishing its rules and styles ever anew. NG is a character through which the artist recreated herself, allowing her art to intersect with the nomadic life she dreams up for her. NG experiments with all kinds of alternative habitats, from mobile houses and shelters, to architectural prototypes, testifying to a rich diversity in realizable utopias. The work presents itself as a reflection on how the spaces we inhabit influence our sensations, thoughts and desires, and how they finally also model our condition and the things that happen to us. Dwelling in the curved spaces of Antti Lovag's Bubble House, dreaming under the sky-domes, NG transforms her whole being. Through these sensorial experiences she invents a plurality of life styles for NG. This DIY residency was the occasion for NG to see if she could become a builder herself. In her drawings, she imagined micro-habitats where circulation between the inside and the outside would be fluid, where the space would be as open and free as possible. Through these imaginary dwellings, she expresses an architectural desire, an art of living that remains faithful to the ethics of nomadism.

Joël Verwimp and Nicolas Y Galeazzi brought to the DIY platform the issue of collective knowledge production and the necessity of developing alternative forms

for collaborative practices.

They gather people around them, and invite them to work and experiment with graphs, texts, drawings, through actions such as copying, reading and writing, in a dynamic blurring of the borders between these practices. By decontextualizing, reassembling, and confronting heterogeneous contents, a common pool of knowledge establishes itself. The participants' thoughts can circulate around a rhizome of concepts and ideas, following trajectories that can be shared for a while or generate disjunctions. Through a process where nobody has the lead, a collective form of understanding is produced that advances by circumvolutions, and willingly maintains itself in uncertainty. The practice aims to dig further into the areas where inter-subjective communication fails or collapses. It is about engaging in these free zones of indistinguishability, where thinking reaches its point of criticality. It is in these interstitial zones that potentialities can emerge, that we can find elements to expand and reconfigure our frames. An essential aspect of Coyotl is the engagement in a meta-reflection on the interactions between the individuals that are evolving in this flow of knowledge. By testing out experimental forms of dialogue and exchange, and consciously acknowledging this relational space in its discursive but also sensory and emotional dimensions, other modalities to engage in the common or to articulate collaborative practices can develop, other ways of inhabiting uncertainty together can emerge. Nicolas and Joël want collaboration to be un-negotiated, bearing the readiness to host the other in its irreducible difference, and in doing so "taking the risk of receiving more than one can contain".

The properties of each of these projects suggest the possibility of a passage, of a moving towards heterotopias that could be very close to our everyday realities. In trying to approach the DIY ethos through this residency, we can acknowledge a radical commitment to what emerges in the here and now and be ready to receive and respond to it unconditionally. The acceptance of a form of shared vulnerability is also fundamental, as a precondition for the emergence of the potential hidden in what exists already between oneself, other people and the complex ecologies we're part of. The open playground of the MicroMarché provides a suitable location for such critical poetic events.

Lilia Mestre

(curator of DIY)

Coralie Stalberg: Can you explain how the writings of Nicolas Bourriaud informed the way you think about DIY practices?

Lilia Mestre: I am concerned by his analysis of the establishment of operational spaces where art can play differently, and by his questioning of what has driven art to want that space. Bourriaud says that these social spaces are occupied by artistic forms that are not necessarily objects or performances, but rather an assemblage of relationships.

Other fields such as economics and politics have appropriated art, and thus in turn the performance and the object, by defining them as static forms. Decorative and seductive art is taken by the institution as being representative of what 'good' is. At the other end of the spectrum there is the role of art as an autonomous field in a kind of non-space, where these conventional practices or ways of doing cannot be used without losing their critical scope and becoming complaisant.

It's as if the critical space is barely able to manifest itself in theatres or museums. The social space is a place that can restore the sensitive, where we can bring in different points of view and open up perspectives on life.

Where do we live, how do we live and what do we live? What do we want? These ideas, developed by Bourriaud, speak to me.

CS: How do you view the multiplication of aesthetics drawing on DIY approaches in contemporary creation?

LM: The DIY approach is becoming more and more apparent in reaction to a context that is becoming too rigid. It is about creating operational spaces – when a format is exhausted, another one must be proposed. I would say that although the content can be exhausted, the format never is. One can find infinite other ways of doing.

It was interesting to look at this idea in relation to DIY because it is also linked to the economy – it is not just a format as such. Artistic practices are reliant both on institutions and on the amount of money an artist has to produce with. These elements interfere with the making of art and the resulting work. MicroMarché in this regard had a certain influence on what was possible given the infrastructure of the space and its semi-public status.

CS: Did taking the DIY residency to the heart of the MicroMarché, a market for artistic creation, inevitably lead to an investigation into the instrumentalization of creativity?

LM: It became a theme in itself. We spoke

about economics and certainly about instrumentatization. I think this is what Bourriaud is also talking about – the instrumentalization of art and creativity. If artwork is limited to the protocol between artists and curators we are definitely beyond what artistic practice actually is.

CS: As the work on the relational has been an important aspect of this residency, I was wondering what the experience of working with the heterogeneous public of MicroMarché was like. Contemporary art is not considered to be easily accessible to publics not familiar with its language. Have you been confronted with this?

LM: The difficulty of communicating has been noticeable. In MicroMarché we encountered depreciative attitudes, but they didn't really go beyond "this is not beautiful", at least in the initial phase. Creating a dialogue demands maybe just a little bit more time, a certain permanency and a relationship. On the other hand I don't agree that art has to fulfil an educative function. I think art is an interesting space of questioning, observation, surprise and errancy.

CS: Jacques Rancière takes an interesting position in this regard, that he develops in The ignorant schoolmaster. By questioning the so-called gap between the one who knows and the one who doesn't know, he challenges a pedagogy that aims to 'transmit' knowledge. My conviction is that sensitization to the issues of contemporary art happens through the engagement in a common search, a path where knowledge is constructed together.

LM: Yes, I like that idea very much. But for that you need time and availability. Which goes against the pressure of having to produce art. You never have the time, the space or the money. You have to be fast. It is finally more about finding solutions than engaging in questioning. You should only start on a path of practical reflection once you have received the time to develop a hypothesis. Only after that can you work with a sense of continuity. We are engaged in very formatted ways of doing. It is now necessary to start to question those formats. Three months of residency followed by a premiere has become a standard in the creation of performances, but who said that it has to be that way? It is interesting just to raise the question: what kind of economy of production are we part of? To refer to the Emancipated Spectator, also by Rancière, the public has to work on his part, he has to become involved when he looks at

an artwork. The question is not if the painting is red or green, but how one sees that painting. How do I interpret it, what does it make me think of, and where does it lead and position me? I read an interesting text on Tino Sehgal in the book How to do things with art by Dorothea von Hantelmann. This artist is not working with the object any more, which has been the incarnation of art for a very long time. Art as an object can be looked at, exchanged and visited for centuries as an immortal thing. The object becomes a symbol, which produces the certitude that art exists as a symbol. Sehgal, however, made the object disappear. How did he succeed in perpetuating his work, which is in fact a choreography? He invents a device where people carry out movements and are replaced by others taking over these movements. The knowledge of this choreography can be transmitted indefinitely. We are in a process of perpetuating an immaterial thing, the durability of which can be eternal. Tino Sehgal does this in museums, which for him coincide with the space of history. Situating oneself in the museum allows for the questioning of a lot of things, because one incorporates oneself into an environment that already bears the question.

CS: Do you think there are viable alternatives that are developing outside of what is produced within an institutional framework?

LM: There are always alternatives but we are very accustomed to working in an institutional context and these relationships are very complex. What should we do? In the end we also have to reach curators and programmers in order to realize what we wish to accomplish.

DIY is not even against authority (power), it is expressing a need for diversity. It is not a utopian attitude, nor a revolutionary idea, but rather the opening up of a possibility. It also brings us back to the necessity of questioning and contextualizing new initiatives that appear. A lot of people are currently using this approach and it is interesting to question this tendency.

On the other hand there is still a lot of relevant creation happening in theatres and museums.

When I speak about economics, I speak about the means of production, not really about poverty, even if this goes together in a way, since many among us don't have much money. The system in itself though, is not in such a precarious state.

I also appreciate approaches that propose spaces that are a bit confusing, that can't be apprehended immediately and where you have to

discover or do something. You have to be in the space, you cannot just look. You have to spend a certain amount of time there. I like this idea of having to give some of your time to sit, talk, and to offer a certain 'availability'. For me this resonates with life in contemporary society, where we cannot take that time and where we always have to go faster. Black and white, yes and no, you only have two possibilities, the false choice. I like formats that engage time, being-there and involvement. This is something that succeeded well during this residency.



BUREAU d'ESPOIR

Bureau d'Espoir is a research project by Elke Van Campenhout, set up in the context of a.rc (a.pass research centre: www.apass.be). For the Thematics DIY, Bureau d'Espoir collaborated with Pierre Rubio and Isabelle Pauwelyn, especially with regards to the development of 'Blind Practices'.

Bureau d'Espoir is a research project concerned with a contemporary understanding of hope as an artistic practice. One decade into the 21st century, hope seems to have re-entered the political and artistic agenda. As a way of handling ecological doom, global confusion and political terror, hope opens up different strategies to define relationships, rethink ethics and come to another understanding of the role of the artist in society. Bureau d'Espoir redirects the question of the (im)possibility of hope as an artistic strategy. Is there something like a choreography of hope, rearranging the way we relate to our everyday worlds? Is there an artistic attitude that questions and realigns our relationship to our environment and everything/everyone in it? Is there a shared social body that can produce hope as a social movement, as a constant flow of possibilities?

Coralie Stalberg: How does the question of hope relate to your everyday practice?

Elke Van Campenhout: I started to work on hope out of my experience organizing a post-master artistic research program (a.pt: advanced performance training) and talking to a lot of young and not-so-young-anymore artists. They expressed the feeling of somehow being stuck in a double bind: on one hand they felt the obligation to take a position, to be political, to react to a world they felt to be oppressive, completely focused on the false promise of creating pleasure through the endless (re)production of consumerist experiences. On the other hand, they were well aware of the fact that they themselves were part of this system, and even producing the same strategies over and over again. Even in their attempts to take a critical stance, in trying to overcome their frustration, they stormed right into the same invisible glass wall time after time. There was a kind of undetectable frustration mark in space, depriving them of their agency, of their power to (re)act, make a change or make something happen.

CS: That seems to be a quite bleak perspective on hope.

EVC: Yes, this is a hope that is almost desperate – a hope that doesn't project a distant future in which our ideologies are fulfilled. This is a critical hope, in the sense that we understand 'a critical patient', namely on the verge of dying. Critical hope is the moment when we ask the Kantian question one more time: "what can we hope for?" but without trying to make this into a grand gesture. Critical hope is a much more humble project, trying to come to an awareness of small changes, of the affective power that opens up new possibilities, of the potential that is hidden in the everyday, in the concreteness of the situation, in my dealings with my surroundings and with the people around me.

CS: Does that mean that this hope is no longer a personal hope?

EVC: Yes, very much so. In Bureau d'Espoir we try to produce hope in situ. We try to let hope appear in space as a kind of transformative power, not necessarily for the 'performers' involved, but for anyone entering or passing by, for the users of the city, the commuters and the accidental tourists who encounter the project by chance. In Bureau d'Espoir, we try to refine naïvety as a working strategy.

We are off course not unaware of the critical situation hope is in, but we try to find ways of making this last tiny bit of potentially powerful energy circulate in the city, working out of a sweet green caravan, sending little notes out into the world and doing interviews with passers-by. It was off course very nice to work next door to Radical_hope and compare notes from a distance.

CS: The most visible practices you developed were the 'Blind Practices'. How is blindness connected to your idea of hope?

EVC: In all the reading we did on the subject of hope, which was very closely related to the construction of the social-affective body, as was developed in collaboration with choreographer Lilia Mestre in a previous research project, we kept on stumbling over some central terms: vulnerability, affectivity, openness, the dissolving of the personal body, the creation of affective space including bodies and objects, and so on. We read Brian Massumi and Spinoza, grappled with some political theory and talked about anarchism. For me, the blind practice opens up the space of non-intentionality. We (Pierre Rubio, Isabelle Pauwelyn and myself) were in the space, but we were not trying to construct a narrative towards it or each other.

During the first days we simply tried to come up with 'Blind Office Practices' for the Bureau d'Espoir. We were office workers attempting to get an impossible job done: writing memos and putting them up on the wall, trying out silent discussions and meetings (when you were never sure the other people were really there), exploring the landscape of the office, disappearing into the architecture, having lunch etc. After a while your sense of time and space totally changes, and what forms itself in the space is not so much a performance by some lost dancers, but it is the space itself that starts to change and people's behaviour within it takes on a slightly different quality. People just went on with what they were doing, in this case rebuilding the MicroMarché area, so there was a lot of noise and movement. But within all that hustle and bustle, there were three workers in a completely different zone, but inhabiting the same space anyhow.

CS: Did you take the practice into the public space?

EVC: During the last day of the practice we changed location and started to work on the small grassy area in front of MicroMarché, which is used by a very mixed group of people – some Roma having lunch, office workers taking a break, families, and youngsters hanging

around. We worked with two blind people and one person recording what he/she saw happening with a small audio recorder. All of a sudden the practice started making a lot more sense. Although we were kind of disturbing the open space we were working in before, outside we stopped being performers, and became markers of the landscape. People didn't pay that much attention, but the bodies marked, in quite a subtle way, distances and perspectives. They opened up another way of interpreting or using the landscape. We repeated this action at the opening of LaLimite, an artist community in Brussels with a kind of modern architecture reminiscent of a Swiss holiday camp. The blind bodies there marked the architecture by getting lost on the stairs, shuffling their way through the reception and so forth. The vulnerability and the concentration you experience from within is completely different from the clean, almost serene markers it produces – markers of potential, of small changes, of a transformation in the relationships we have to others and to space.

CS: So hope is nothing in itself, it is only a relational term?

EVC: Hope is about rethinking space and relationships in the now, in the undeniable specificity of the situation, in the ethics

of the encounter. Hope is about daring to allow change to happen, however microscopic, in whatever kind of way. A hopeful gesture is one that alters the situation: between you and me or between my environment and myself, and in that moment changes both of us. In other words: how can we re-think the different 'spaces' we inhabit and how can we think about the co-existence of different zones of experience? Knowledge and experience are flexible, they re-assemble and align themselves constantly, adjusting to the elastic borders of highly developed consumerism. But where is the hope in this? How do we understand these boundaries? Where can we introduce difference, overlay one kind of experience with another one and open up these zones of doubt, affect and choice, putting into question what we can and cannot experience together?

CS: Your hope, although critical, separates radically from the future perspective it carries in our every day understanding of it.

EVC: Yes, hope in this age can no longer be projected upon a distant utopia, a far-away future. We no longer believe in the big ideologies, since we seem to have been completely sucked in by the all-encompassing musings of capitalism. Instead of dreaming about a bloody revolution, hope situates itself today in

the eternal now, in every situation, relationship and ethical set-up you commit to. Hope is relational, but not in the sense of a safe cosmopolitan interest in the 'other'. Hope takes as its starting point the interest in what

binds us, our contemporary complex identities, our daily confrontation with nomadism and migration, and our questioning of resistance within a globalized community. I wrote it down like this during one of the workshops on hope:

*hope as the now,
de-futurized*

*hope as
a social body,
de-individualized*

*hope as
a social affect,
de-personalized*

*hope as invention
hope as movement*

*hope as change
hope as
choreography*

CS: Bureau d'Espoir is only the first stage in a larger research project on Critical Hope. How will you continue?

EVC: Indeed, Bureau d'Espoir is actually the happy side of Critical Hope (the full title of the project is Critical Hope: the choreography of the Social Body in Transformation). In the next stage I will concentrate on the darker flip side of hope and dive into the truly impossible preconditions that hope requires to be

able to construct itself. This second stage will be called LaZone and will focus exactly on the difficulty of living together and of coming to an understanding of the social body we (fail to) construct. LaZone is a much more political concept, undermining our cosmopolitan and democratic hopes. LaZone will balance precariously on the tipping point between the critical and the impossible.



B a v o Olbrechts

Coralie Stalberg: Can you describe your artistic practice?

Bavo Olbrechts: Although most of the artists involved in this residency are performance artists, I have a background in visual arts. I have developed a form of playing around with my own work in which I try to observe how I interact with the things that I make. The work develops out of this process and this is somehow linked to the idea of the performative.

CS: You use eclectic media such as photography, drawing and carpentry. Can you tell me more about this?

BO: It is really very mixed. The basis is indeed drawing and carpentry, because they are ways of obtaining two- or three-dimensional results quickly and easily. The research that flows from this can take all kinds of shapes, though there is always an element of exhibition or a spatial dimension present in the work. Even if it ends up as a film or sound work, my interest in methods of presentation is always there.

CS: What have been important inspirations for you?

BO: Above all I've been influenced by musical culture. I always felt much more at home with music and pop culture,

than in artistic contexts. It was only later that I discovered that I was a part of a longer tradition of visual artists attracted by the world of pop culture – for example Dan Graham has also written music reviews, and is very interested in science fiction.

CS: You've also travelled a lot and I think this has had a strong influence on your art.

BO: Yes, I'm quite sure of it. There is something that always comes back again and again in what I do without being specifically worked out: an ethnographical and self-reflexive element. I also refer to the writings of travellers who undertake long journeys, such as mountaineers and sailors. To the people themselves these achievements are perhaps important, but might be regarded as completely pointless by others. These travellers undergo experiences that involve a lot of time and a certain kind of boredom is cultivated in the process.

CS: How did you come to take part in the DIY thematic?

BO: Actually it was Lilia Mestre who invited me to join this residency. Indeed my work does give the impression of being very independent and there is a link between the way I produce and the DIY ethos. I feel connected to the idea of DIY through my focus on developing something or

myself without any regard to production. Something can be realized without it necessarily resulting in a 'work' as such.

CS: One might call it an autonomy that focuses on the making-process. What about the idea of DIY as art forms that develop without support, within precarious economies? What is your view on this? Is it important for you to work outside institutional structures?

BO: Autonomy is an important aspect of my work. There is an element of unavoidability in being an artist – I've never regarded it as a vocation you could choose. It is something that has to follow its own path, and because of this, as an artist, I am positioned outside the regular economy. On the other hand I am also able to 'fit in' or develop towards a system, sometimes out of pure necessity. I would rather think of DIY as being a system of sorts, which continues to search for its own way – this element of independence is important. For me DIY is also about having the self-belief that things can be made or done, and to this extent it does not have to be developed outside institutions or completely autonomously. Trusting in your ability to realize or change things so that you can make something on your own, so that you can build or start something up, this is my idea of DIY. It's not so much an economic critique nor

geared towards the notion of exchange, as seems to be central to this residency. DIY is rooted in the idea of a social movement and this makes it sound rather like the art of the sixties. In my view there are other ways to engage with the DIY approach.

CS: Do you think this social critique is related to a certain form of nostalgia?

BO: Sometimes it is a bit nostalgic. In my work critique is present to some extent, but it is realized from an artistic point of view. The work that I produce and the manner in which I make it is an attempt to formulate something in the process of unfolding the whole. The way I do this creates some kind of a critique, but this is not something I consciously choose. I try to examine meanings when they arise during the working process and I relate to this very consciously, as was certainly the case during this residency. But I never want to translate something into my own images, on the contrary: I want my images to translate something in return.

CS: Can you already tell me something about the work you've been developing during this residency?

BO: To begin with I wanted to walk, and see what could develop out of this. It was purely about what I would perceive, not about the specificity of the experience I would have.

I was curious to see if I could make something that would happen outside my studio. Brussels is a city that I both know and don't know and I wanted to have a similar experience to the ones I've had during my travels. But all too soon I was confronted with meanings. I was searching for the tropics in Brussels and before I'd realized it, my research had become full of strong associations with migrants and the colonial past. These things can't be incorporated very well into my way of working – I like more abstract approaches. So I found myself in a bit of a bind, because I had been too specific at the very beginning of the process.

The initial idea of conceiving a route is slowly changing now. I've developed a kind of minimal program of what I would do if I were filmed for one day. The film will consist of three parts representing boredom, action and rest. I will use different media, starting with drawing something repetitive, moving on to action that will be generated by sound or movement, and coming back to rest again. The tropics evolved into a soundscape that creates images and metaphors rather than literal meanings.



Approaching the Metalogue

Skype conference with **Joël Verwimp, Nicolas Y Galeazzi, Coralie Stalberg & Pilvi Porkola:**

MicroMarché, May 2010

Questions

[13:55:01] Coralie Stalberg: You want to conduct this interview via Skype, even though we are sitting next to each other in your project space. There is one computer for questions, two computers for answers and one for writing observations into a separate word document. For now, I'm sitting at the questions and you two at the answers. First question: You responded to the invitation Do It Yourself through an exploration of processes of writing and copying. How did you 'inscribe' yourself into the theme of the DIY residency?

[14:00:20] CS: Floating and in-scribing..

Observations

Pilvi Porkola: I accepted an invitation from artists Nicolas Y Galeazzi and Joël Verwimp to attend a three-day workshop in Brussels to read, re-read and re-write together their newly crafted book *The Leakers*. Considering the fact that the book was totally unreadable, in the sense one usually understands reading, re-writing it opened up a broad platform for the mutual observation of working processes and collaborative procedures. The book is a collage of fragments, letters, texts, quotations, diagrams, floor plans, signs and images that are not really images. It speaks of a research into experimental modes of collaboration, especially a certain notion of a non-negotiated collaboration.

One afternoon Coralie Stalberg from Bains Connective came to interview Galeazzi and Verwimp. It was conducted as a chat session in Skype and I was there to observe and write a parallel text about the situation. So we sat around the table, each with our own computer, and started. This performance speaks of a research into experimental modes non-negotiated collaboration. The following text should therefor be seen as part of the Verlegt/Verlag praxis in trying to establish a metalogue, searching for a performance on paper.

Answers I and II

[13:58:22] Nicolas Y Galeazzi: I like the fact that you use 'inscribe' to describe our relationship to DIY. I think it's exactly what we had to do: to engrave ourselves into the surface of the theme. It had to embody us as much as we had to embody it. We approached DIY by writing, by 'in-scribing' our approach into the offer of the host.

[13:58:43] Joël Verwimp: I would say it like this: a pizza is something with a dough base, a layer of tomato sauce and a variety of things floating on top. One of these things floating on top has been the theme DIY.

[14:01:35] JV: It's like Manuela (an accomplice in our last public performance) said: "let's go to our islands, we have to start swimming." By being incidental persons^[1] for each other, we ask the questions, who is jumping into the cold water, who is floating and who is swimming? In which context are we bumping into the horizon of each other's personal view – the island?"



Which writing processes make a real difference to an interview?

How is this different from talking?

No instant reaction, there is always a delay!

What does this delay do to the communication?

A different kind of connection?

[13:55:01] CS: What was your toolbox for generating these processes?

They love metaphors! Don't we all?

[14:09:20] CS: What was your toolbox for generating these processes?

Lots of silence, the sound of typing.

What are they doing while they are writing?

[14:07:35] NYG: Not sure if pizza is a good metaphor for it, but I experienced it more like trying to bake a pizza from scratch in outer space, floating in the ether without gravity. Everyone as a lonely astronaut! Baudrillard describes us as astronauts, doesn't he? How was that again?

[14:09:00] JV: I don't really know about the astronauts, but my question is, if you are an incident in the field of my consciousness, my context, will I be incidental in the context of anything else? Therefore this skype image is entering my field while I am sending my content as an image to the context of N. All is mutual, no one is first.

[14:10:26] JV: Making Space: performance // Taking space: production. Renewal of feeling like a dream, feeling of the new, only felt: the model of sensation, as it happens. Sensation for DIY is the advent of the event of potential.

[14:12:22] NYG: In the beginning there were almost no tools, and I really appreciate that. It was more about swimming by yourself in a common pool, while being curious about the style of swimming of the others in the same pool. We often bumped into each other. This was very good! The context and the content did their best to force us to confront each other, to see our differences, our commitment to the common and our

Now I think they are reacting to the situation. In this situation, reacting means something different from reacting face to face.

[14:12:45] CS: Can you describe the shapes that these experimental dialogues took?

[14:13:55] CS: It seems to me that you are experimenting at the edge of what is normally understood by 'dialogue'. How is subjectivity challenged by this rather isolated way of dialoguing?



I would like to ask something about copying!

How does it feel?

Where does it go?

What does it produce, if your answer is not a copy of a reaction?

And when you have the copy in your hand, what's next?

I mean, if I weren't here, how would you explain it, describe it?

[14:21:36] CS: Sensation, Affect, Corporality and the flow of Knowledge. Were these ideas explicitly thematized?

Can't understand the words I hear from other room.

capacity to engage with each other by remaining independent. So the content and context was more 'It does It Itself' and we were floating in this pool in order to find our positions, methods and strategies.

[14:18:09] JV: In order to describe the experimental dialogues I would say that there are always current situations that don't fit our current actions. I think it's mainly like that. We always want to bring those situations and our actions into sync. This is where the chaos starts. Fine! By bringing things into sync in one place, we disorganize the 'other' place, we acknowledge how disorganized the 'other' is, and we start to reorganize again. The content of these dialogues is like any relationship, using the relationship as a medium you can meet and merge automatically with other contents. There is something dynamic going on in this space because together we form an environment and we are not really aware of this fact.

[14:26:55] JV: In our space here in Brussels, everything is part of a metalogue: ideas, material, books, A4, the written text and the areas around certain furniture. Everything is a blank page. The cardboard under the pizza was one as well. It got stained by the oil of the pizza.

What is it then? I see grey circles, which are a clear sign that there once was a pizza there.

Silence.
The sound of typing again.

[14:35:05] CS: You like to invite guests to dive into the common pool of the pizza. "Unbedingte Gastfreundschaft" is an important notion in your work."



What time is it?

I ignore it and see it again as a 'blank page'. I copy it and see how I can relate it to other material. I see it as a landscape, as a moon landscape and produce a new page by copying it. I ignore content formed by the carbon and see it as a 'blank page', put it on the table and wait.

[14:35:18] JV: The question about the guest is very central to my work and I will talk about it later, but for me the difference between collaborating with and working with someone firstly comes down to intention. If I want to collaborate with someone it is because I want to spend time deliberately and consciously, have my mind, my being and therefore my work influenced, infected and altered by the desires, various types of knowledge and experiences of the people with whom I am collaborating. Secondly, I want our exchange to result in its own 'third thing' - new to, greater and unseen by any of us. It comes from my belief that "a group is always smarter than its smartest individual", and yes my research tries to explore whether collaboration is truly possible, desirable, and how we might collaborate successfully. By that I mean collaborating while avoiding dilution, unproductive compromise and indulgence. My work is about doing this, aiding this, facilitating this and writing this. I explore its pur-

I read in *The Leakers*:

"Step one read the index, step two walk into archive, step three acknowledge the system A-Z/0-17, step four pick a sheet by interest/pick a sheet by coincidence/ pick a sheet by (narrative or other) concept/ do not pick a sheet" etc The Leakers, page 97

[14:37:07] CS: You used the photocopier as a tool to incorporate...

I read in a book lying around:

"Of course, this theory — that if one wants to be able to write something, one should know how it is written — has some logic to it. It forces one first to read, then to copy what one reads — to understand somebody else's presentation in order to then re-present it. In art terms, however, this is similar to saying that one has to first look at a model in order to then copy it. Now the logical construction becomes much less persuasive."

Luis Camnitzer, *Art and Literacy*, e-flux journal reader 2009, page 79



pose and potential, and aim to develop strategies that might just be useful, somehow one day. Perhaps it is simply about heightening (auto) reflexivity.

[14:37:17] JV: Answer then copy or copy then answer? Do you see yourself in this sentence N? Is this a familiar sentiment? Do you long to be understood? To be accepted without question?

[15:00:53] NYG: Incorporation is the biggest acknowledgement I can give. Eating up. It takes place where there was something before; and of course it is an invasive, probably infantile and inflationary gesture. This gesture is what we can give away by incorporating. Probably the packman-image helps me here. I'm at the table. My eyes are running around, eating whatever they can eat on this table. They take it in, into the self-made canon of works I've already taken in before. By copying it into my mind, I overlay the old content with new.

[15:02:01] NYG: Therefore the photocopier is our best tool. I would like to incorporate it. I would love to sneak into its corpus and manipulate it! The copier is a body where I can perform my relationship to knowledge. I sit in its body, it sits in my mind and helps me to spit my knowledge out again!

[15:10:26] NYG: This is in fact very important for me!! Spitting it out! Otherwise I get overloaded



*They are starting to talk out loud!!
That's against the rules!*

*C: Did you take the idea of
metalogues from Gregory
Bateson?*

Who is Gregory Bateson?

*[http://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/
Gregory_Bateson](http://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregory_Bateson)*

Aha, Gregory, of course!

*j: Well, it was Derrida referring to
Bateson, wasn't it?*

Hi Jacques, you are here too!

[14:50:36] CS: Joël: To avoid the dilution of difference in the generation of collective thought, you talk about the necessity of an 'amorphous authorship' of an 'incidental person'. Can you elaborate on this?

and I'm already full. Spitting the overlaid papers out of my brain is a survival technique. The knowledge has to be digested until it is forgotten!! This is very important. If I can't spit it out, I can't forget properly. And if I spit it out and no one helps me to digest it, I will soon drown in the 'spit-out' of knowledge around me. Therefore I have to communicate and so the channel of communication where something can be digested has to remain open and kept floating. I have to understand and I have to be understood - never by everyone, not by anyone, but by some people who digest the shit I spit out while I am copying.

[15:11:13] JV: The amorphous is like the AUTHOR AS STEWARD "FOR LIMITED TIMES". But here we are. We are here at this point. And I like it this way, also without a photocopier. We do not call for 'the death of the author,' instead I want to posit a redefinition pursuant to which 'the author' is defined as a joint effort by the colloquial author(s) and the public. In crafting this argument, I rely on the idea that both authors and copyrighted works are 'social constructs'. The concept of 'authorship' as we understand that term today, is a relatively recent notion that began to emerge in the eighteenth century.

I think we should remember that the current con-

[17:19:49] CS: I am interested to know how you processed Baudrillard's texts and what it has generated in the ongoing discussions. I refer in particular to his work The Ecstasy of Communication since I saw it last time on your working table, there to feed the 'photoco-pillages'...



*Yes, he is good at flying,
it's beautiful.*

*Drowning in the ecstasy
of communication*

*heap= kasa, keko, koko, läjä,
röykkiö, rykelmä*

*I read in my agenda: "swimming
school starts 2.7 klo 10:20"*

Starts to make only sense

falling

ception of 'authorship' was not an inevitability given in the literary heritage of the Renaissance. That era primarily viewed the author as either a 'craftsman' who mastered their trade for the enjoyment of the cultivated audience of the court, or alternatively as 'inspired' by external forces. The idea that an author is personally responsible for his work is inconsistent with both of these conceptions and emerged later, in part as a result of the influence of a class of eighteenth century professional writers who sought to justify legal protection for their efforts.

[18:00:54] NYG: Baudrillard is crossing our discussion. He crosses more than he influences. When I read his texts, I often sit there with an open mouth and see him flying through the air, while our problems cross his field vertically. For Example, what has 'obscenity' really to do with us?

We are producing an ecstasy. This is what Baudrillard tells us: our world today is drowning in the ecstasy of communication. We need the ecstasy in order to create the frame for our experiment. Without ecstasy we wouldn't have a natural environment around us. But this ecstasy for him is related to the obscenity of the all-too-visible. With COYOTL we practice in the first place an ecstasy of the everything-becomes-



"Paradoxically," Baudrillard writes, "it is the real that has become our utopia—but a utopia which is no longer a possibility, a utopia we can do no more than dream about, like a lost object." page 310, above.

I quote N:

"never by everyone, not by anyone, but by some who digest the shit I spit out while copying."

visible, but this disguise makes the situation complex. Finally we stand in front of an experimental heap – an overload of knowledge – and have to start swimming, swimming back to our islands. In order to be able to see land we first have to become autistic. Because of our total incapacity to deal with the experimental heap we've created, we start to make sense only to ourselves. The elements in the heap, appear to be as blurry (hidden) as they are transparent (all-too-visible). Don't you think so Joël? Our method often produces a situation where taking a distance is more like a form of dropping our understanding and falling into depression because of a disconnectedness to our own content. There the experiment fails.

[18:21:06] NYG: But it happens that I'm standing in front of the experimental heap of undigested knowledge and I overcome the depression. I take some bits in my hand, I forget the randomness, or acknowledge it, and stitch it together with some other random stuff. I start to make things, sense, and I start to craft (bricolage). It doesn't matter anymore if it is random content, it is just material to be re-crafted. It creates its own content itself. It is not a gesture of building, it is more like a gesture of transformation. In the act of transformation the things become

livable, they become the platform for a dance and this dance we can share.

[18:33:32] JV: We approached the DIY and DO I WHY (why do something rather than doing nothing?) by writing, by inscribing our approach into the offer of the host (it is part of our formatted eating pattern). Answer then copy or copy then answer? Which came first, the chicken or the egg? The host or the guest? Do you see yourself in this sentence N? Is this a familiar sentiment? Do you long to be understood? This has nothing to do with communication in the sense of Baudrillard, but I see that you need to understand and need to be understood (never by everyone, not by anyone, but by some people who digest the shit you spit out while copying). Although I would really like to see you drown (almost) in the spit-out of knowledge around you, the question remains how subjectivity is challenged by dialogue as experimentation at the borders.

Do I why? Chicken or the egg? Do you see yourself in this sentence?

Do you long to be understood?

Do you long to be understood?

Do you long to be understood?

Do you long to be understood?

Do you long to be understood?

I read on the internet: Baudrillard + ecstasy of communication: "Obscenity begins when there is no more spectacle, no more stage, no more theatre, no more illusions, when everything becomes immediately transparent, visible, exposed in the raw and inexorable light of information and communication. We no longer partake of the drama of alienation, but are in the ecstasy of communication."

<http://www.semiotexte.com/books/ecstasyOfComm.html>

Do you see yourself in this sentence?

Epilogue:

"Ich schaue mich um, komme auf dich zu, mache einen Knicks und hole dich auf die Bühne. Wir stolpern, meine Schnürsenkel sind offen; ich trete dir versehentlich auf den Fuss; der Tackt liegt uns überhaupt nicht; wo sollen wir uns halten? Alle schauen zu; und vor allem merken wir nicht wann der Song zu Ende ist."

The Leakers, page 9



[1] The incidental Person (IP) is a concept introduced by the British artist John Latham (ca. 1971) when he was involved with the Artist Placement Group (APG). It characterizes the state of those – artists in the first instance – coming into a situation equipped with a broader perspective. This perspective should allow a disengagement from common notions established within the situation and to induce some transformation. The APG used the concept of the IP in connection with governmental organizations but also in the collaboration amongst themselves.

Heike Langsdorf



radical_hope generates the instruments for social change in times when there is no clear lead to follow. It is a meta-practice that confronts us with what art does and can do. This means researching the principle of changeability and the question of how a context can be touched from an artistic point of view without diminishing its natural complexity. Exploring art making as both a personal and general process, radical_hope is not only the title of the practice, but can also be considered a character and an attitude.

Open-frames.net/radical_hope

Coralie Stalberg: How do you see DIY? Are you committed to DIY practices in order to raise criticism and to redefine an ethics of art making?

Heike Langsdorf: To start with, let's say that if radical_hope is criticizing anything, then it's myself and ourselves. I don't want to project things onto a so-called system, state, 'them' or another illusive 'above'. We make this world ourselves. I consider DIY indeed to be a call for a new ethics of art making. What happens when we honestly do things ourselves? Do we really want to do something ourselves? Everything now is called DIY - It's almost a slogan of sorts. We find it in the commercial world a lot, but we still pay and thus are apparently not doing it ourselves at all. Everything gets assimilated by the market as soon as it has the slightest potential to undermine the market's status quo. Once you put something onto the scene it becomes public and it leaves the off-scene, the obscene. Making things transparent means taking away the subversive force they contain.

What we call 'the market' is not something exterior to us - we are the market. If we are the market then the imperative 'Do It Yourself' is something we address towards ourselves!

When radical_hope was invited to work within the frame of DIY, we had to figure out what we wanted

to do ourselves and so we decided to investigate 'changeability'. I see the principle of changeability in the making of art, which is in fact always concerned with transformation. I think we have all developed to different degrees, the capacity to change things or make things changeable. I am interested in places where this can be played with and rehearsed. Within those places we can realize ourselves as artists and craftspeople, whether we are professionals or not. Within the context of DIY we took the opportunity to have a residency, a place, a shelter that would enable us to create a staged 'changing world'.

CS: DIY also refers to independent ways of producing and financing one's own projects. Which brings us to the question of the economy of the artist and the extent to which the cultural sector has an impact on creation, in terms of processes and formats. What is your view on these issues, and is the need to work autonomously something relevant to you?

HL: There is, in my opinion, given the recent changes in the cultural sector, too much focus on the arts and the artist's position. The work and the content are shifting to the background or even slipping away completely. We often spend too much time debating and lamenting how the subsidy system is changing, or rather,

how it doesn't function. We argue with ministers who can't understand entirely what we are busy with, however skilled we are at expressing what our artistic position and intentions are. I'm not able to support this tendency any longer. We need time to work and Do It Ourselves - not having, but taking the time to work. We have to make ourselves as independent as possible and ask for the necessary support.

At MicroMarché we had a two-month residency and not too much in the way of politics connected to the practicalities - it was a luxury. We worked in a framed and supportive situation, with an adequate budget that allowed us to cover our costs. I think these structures are what we need. These are the places where we can truly work.

Art means the art of making something, the development of skills and techniques to bring to light something that isn't there yet. We need time to learn things instead of wasting our time bragging about what we might have achieved. Achievements are only a by-product of art and we shouldn't take any notice of them. Our achievements should enable a continuation and should be changeable. They should be in motion like vehicles.

Today's monuments do not need to impress a tsar who no longer exists. Art has always

made a place for itself 'outside' society. Where this 'outside' position actually is though, and the nature of the subversive acts that we can carry out there, is always changing.

CS: Jonathan Lear is a writer that inspired you in the development of the radical_hope practices. Can you tell me more about the influence his theory has had on you?

HL: When I read Radical Hope by Jonathan Lear, I did indeed recognize some of my own interests, but I don't want to call this book the theoretical background of radical_hope. Jonathan Lear observes a moment in American history, in which the Native Americans are pushed into isolation. He observes the attitude of one leader, Plenty Coups of the Crow tribe in particular, and compares it with the chief of the Sioux, Sitting Bull. Their attitudes were very different, the Sioux were told by Sitting Bull to fight against the enemy. Plenty Coups followed a vision he'd had as a child, which led him to find a way of adapting his people's values to a new situation. He dedicated his life to the transformation of the psychological structure of his people and tried to make them adaptive and open-minded when facing a new way of life. The subtitle of the book is Ethics in the face of Cultural Devastation. How can you actually continue to live when your culture is collapsing and you know

that there is no coming back? What I find interesting in regard to any culture is the transformation of our psychological structure, individually as well as collectively. The question that Lear emphasizes is how we can bypass cultural depression, personal bitterness and spiritual poverty. How can we orientate ourselves along other, newly constructed values that consist of inherited tradition and the behaviour that is apparently necessary for dealing with the current situation?

CS: Can you tell me when you started implementing radical_hope practices? Which are the issues raised in Ethics in the face of Cultural Devastation that you actually integrated and developed through radical_hope's site-sensitive interventions?

HL: I started to work on my questions concerning personal and social change under the title radical_hope. Both the terms 'radical' as well as 'hope' seemed to be worth researching. Soon the title of the research became the name of a working character, a working attitude that I explored and tested in the context of a pt for one year. radical_hope can be seen as a specific character to be adopted by artists interested in context driven work.

Since I was interested in artistic attitude and behaviour as such, I gave myself one year to work out how radical_hope could be articulated as a changeable set of working ethics, which means they

can be brought into play spontaneously, as well as site-specifically, depending on the context one is thrown into.

What I wanted to investigate further from the book were the following issues: if there is no leader, then who takes the decisions, who leads and who is responsible? How can one behave during processes that are not clearly and hierarchically structured or simply challenge them? How can we come in-between and 'touch' a context? Is this a context that we have to change? Is change what has to happen to the context or do we have to change ourselves, since we are part of society as well as being artists? What does our 'doing' look like in the given situation and what is its effect?

We remain the performers but what should our actions achieve or symbolize? Do we initiate, execute, confuse, facilitate, construct and orientate? Or do we have to dance with and between all these positions in order to bring motion to a set situation? How can we open up to something interesting? The question that kept on coming back was: "Who can tell if change has to happen and if so, what kind?" I would like to consider dealing with these questions as radical performing, and whoever asks them is a radical performer.

There seems to be an obsession with social change but sometimes things are good as they are, and we should leave them alone. At other times and in other places things are blocked or paralyzed, so we can free or stimulate them. Again, at other moments we need to understand that the collapsing situation should be neither saved nor manipulated.

However, in order to understand what art can do in a certain context we have to experience this context for a while. We need to understand our artistic moment. As an artist you no longer have to come up with a satellite idea and to be set up in a context within which you can realize it. Today there are so many opportunities for artists to actually apply in situ the very principle of art-making, changeability. We can arrive in a context, be confronted with something we don't know and then use this as the starting point to make art. Which does not mean that we have to socially commit to a situation for a lifetime. I think there is a way of dealing with a social reality in an as yet unknown context and making art without losing an artistic approach. The task of 'being creative' is shifting to 'listening to what happens'.

CS: With Changing Room you developed a prototype for Bureau Annex, an experimental program on changeability within a mixed public, involving people that live at or use Gare du Nord on a daily basis. Can you tell me more about that project?

HL: Bureau Annex is a program by radical_hope that researches democracy, with Christiane Huber and myself as performers. It is an attempt to create an active space for people dwelling in the city - in streets, houses, villas, palaces or even underground.

As soon as we rationalize the way we cope with our living conditions in today's so-called democracy, it seems that we forget one important question: how do we want to live and what do we want to do in our social life? What are we passionate about in this society? How can we participate in or assume the responsibility for performing democratic actions? The idea behind Bureau Annex is to create a team of people that lead their urban lives in very different ways, determined by clearly incomparable conditions. Can we overcome the urge to think in terms of victims/offenders by adopting an artistic attitude that does not help, discriminate or pity? Can the desire 'to work together on something' be a means of exploring another democratic opportunity? Can THE MAKING OF

ART become a tool for the redefinition of democracy? Isolating a certain way of living and its community from the other is just one of many possible ways of dealing with the very different coexisting ways of living in a city. We are interested in developing a place where new, different habits and behaviours can develop. Our long-term project is to open a gallery space in the building complex of Gare du Nord in Brussels, to be used as a workshop, a studio and a place for exhibitions. We now need to learn how to manage or rather un-manage such a place.

CS: Which artistic tools and strategies developed during Do It Yourself could be applicable first of all to Bureau Annex, and then to other social contexts?

HL: CHANGING ROOM - rehearsals for a changing world was our first step in finding answers to the question: how can we propose something if we don't know how it will work?

We divided the two-month residency into two phases. During the first month we installed the space. While in the process of installing we were able to make connections within the context of MicroMarché and its neighbourhood. The first step was to talk to the people running MicroMarché. We were going to open a space that had to define itself while being developed

within their structure - a market that was independent, though still based on profit making. We discovered that what linked us was the interest in prototyping, where research and production can co-exist.

After having agreed on this middle-ground, we decided to look for a very concrete thing that would fulfil the role of a 'contact-maker', relating us to the context we were dropped into and its surroundings. What we found were wooden palettes: promising raw material for our 'furniture' models. They could be found at MicroMarché as well as in the neighbouring streets. They belonged to someone and yet they were currently not being used, left in a corner of the building or even a public space, ready to get picked up sooner or later. These wooden palettes of various sizes allowed us to get into direct contact with the people we didn't know yet, without getting too personal. We were in temporary need of palettes and they had what we needed. During these exchanges the first conversations about changeability might emerge. We could invite them to follow the project and they might accept, follow or refuse the invitation.

After one month of installation, talking to people, cooking and eating together in MicroMarché, we entered

a second phase. We announced the opening of a space that could be used for a maximum of one day by whoever had a proposal. 'Using' could be freely interpreted as, for example, curating, squatting and occupying, as long as in one way or another it would change the current function and/or setting. The daily reality of MicroMarché protected, and at the same time reinforced this experimental room: the doors were open at all times, even when we were not present. In retrospect we can see some very different ways and forms of changing. The range of practiced changeability ranged from well thought-out proposals for using the space to anonymous changes. Some changes based on interesting misunderstandings occurred. For example when the people trading at MicroMarché sent their clients to the small wooden dressing room that was installed in the bigger Changing Room, the clients arrived and asked where the mirrors were. Since the Changing Room proposes an inventory of things rather than a conventional situation, the mirror was not connected in any spatial or functional sense to the dressing room. It was the clients, who wanted the mirror to stand next to the dressing room, and they then moved the furniture around according to their needs. While doing so they would stop to

ask themselves: what is actually going on here? We would then explain that the Changing Room was a working place that could somehow 'catch' people but that wouldn't force them to stay. There were moments where the logic of the market and the logic of the Changing Room met. The Changing Room was seen as an artificial place colliding with a place that was conventional. The collision produced irritation, discussions, and actions.

The set-up in MicroMarché was a model or prototype, and not something that can be copied and pasted onto other situations. The principles of self-curating could be investigated further in these places, however. Changing Room, the prototype could raise the interest of people wanting to develop a Changing Room in other contexts. For the moment we have to reflect and evaluate, to talk more about what the freedoms as well as the conditions for a Changing Room in the sense of radical hope are. What makes any space a so-called 'changing room'? What seems to be clear is that the people running it should indeed be artists themselves. They should be interested in this impossible endeavour of cur(at)ing such a space in the conventional sense. Curating becomes being present, taking care of and 'curing' a place that is in a constantly changing state. It's

a messy job in a messy world – let's say it's radical cur(at)ing.

CS: Did you manage to reach out to local people, get them to participate in your project, and generate a genuine exchange? Did the space host people of very different backgrounds?

HL: Changing Room as a project was announced only once by e-mail to our network, the rest of its public success was based on word of mouth communication. The public that visited us were a mixture of people we knew personally and others we had never met before. The presence of different backgrounds is the condition for different ways of making – Art-making, Craft-making, Thought-Making and Change-Making. Some people were passers-by and others lived in the park in front of MicroMarché. Precisely here lies the difficult question of how a space can invite people to come on the basis of an open-call without at the same time being over-run by its own nature. This question leads to a deeper reflection on 'hospitality'. If the atmosphere of the room is too specific, it invites a certain group and closes itself to others.

It is important that the installation really takes the time it needs. Every installation of a Changing Room varies from context to context. That means that we have to deal with a certain aesthetics that lies

somewhere between 'not too perfect' on the one hand and 'not too run-down' on the other. Something that comes across as being 'clearly changeable in other directions' invites us to get in-between – it can be touched and can function as a kind of middle ground.

Changing Room at MicroMarché created a tool for us, allowing us to be both inside and outside a context at the same time. We could observe ourselves in this place and see what people understood when they were invited to change themselves, the place and the(ir) world. How concretely do you have to work in order to translate theoretical concerns into practice? We were becoming overly concrete with change, almost utterly obsessed with change in the hope of understanding something more abstract and general about it.

Christiane and I behaved on a kind of meta-social level. We invited people for informal dinners, which were to be considered both a convivial experience and a working session. We would 'communicate through dinners', with the dinner taking on the role of a medium of sorts. In this neighbourhood it was a good idea not to confuse people too much. When you address men dwelling in the streets and suggest cooking something together, they usually accept the invitation. But when you

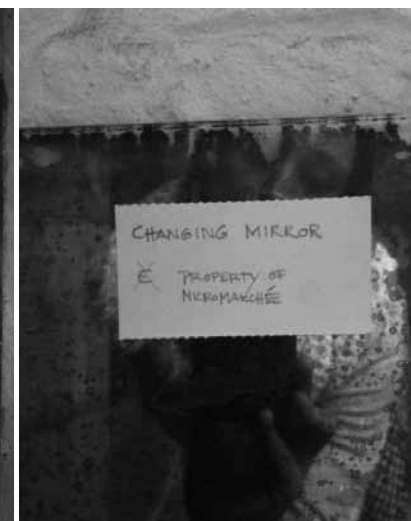
clearly tell them that this dinner is also a project to which they have been invited as actors, there is a moment where they can gain or lose interest. It soon becomes evident whether they just like being approached, or if they are willing to be open to something not yet clearly understandable.

CS: I like the association that you make between curating and curing very much. How do you see the relationship between the artistic and the therapeutic in this work? Can you tell me something about the collaborative process between you and

the psychologist Christiane Hubert?

HL: Christiane and I committed ourselves to 'setting the stage for' but not 'forcing' others or 'filling in' ourselves. We were soon confronted with the logic we find in the emergence of rituals. Rituals are a set of actions following a set of rules, made by and for the people who have invented them. The individual accepts the staged situation as something that helps him or her to go through something, using it as a bridging space or a period in time, a passage, which carries him or her from

one state to another. The 'stagedness' of rituals protects what is enabled: a transformation. Strictly speaking, a Changing Room is a social ritual, invented by radical hope that follows a set of rules for the conception of a space offering changeability. Whatever happens in a well-conceived Changing Room is consciously performed within and for a world without a leader. Conceiving, Organizing and Performing a Changing Room could be considered a period of training or research in self-programming and natural cur(at)ing.



NG

Coralie Stalberg: Do it yourself is an invitation to explore other ways of living and is intimately linked to the concept of architectural utopias. Can you explain how the realizable utopias of Yona Friedman and also the habitology of Antti Lovag have influenced you?

NG: I discovered Yona's drawings by chance in a Portuguese magazine during a residency I had there in 2001. I immediately identified with the work since drawing is one of my practices too. I loved his drawings in which everything seems simple and easy to realize. He makes drawings that create the desire and the possibility to build.

Then I found out exactly who the 'non-architect' Yona Friedman was, read his books and finally met him in the context of an exhibition entitled Architectures of Survival curated by Komplot (Brussels) in Berlin in which we both participated. I started a movie with and about Yona. The first part was realized in his apartment in Paris in 2008 and one year later we re-enacted the same scenario in Los Angeles where we met again for another exhibition. I feel very connected to Yona the thinker and the artist when he asks questions about utopia, the possibility of living in a kind of paradise and overcoming many constraints and presumed needs.

Antti Lovag is first of all a builder who calls himself a 'habitologue', meaning that he gets rid of architectural rules in order to embark on a real adventure based around the question of 'living'.

I lived in Antti's bubble house in November and December 2008 and if I consider my work to be inventing new ways of living for NG, then that experience of living in a bubble house transformed me and the perception of NG. Many people used the photos I took while living there and I got an offer to live in another bubble house. By living in a given space I become in a certain way the architect of that space.

Below is an extract from the end of a text about space that was recently published (Synapse - fine arts school, Rueil Malmaison France):

2009 Los Angeles

the space modifies me

I modify the space

I stay there

I don't move

I am transformed

I am not the same person

I used to be

I transform the space

I do nothing

I am an architect

I do nothing

I am an architect

CS: Through the character NG, we the spectators experience an emancipation that refers to the possibility and responsibility of inventing and testing other ways of living in the world, other life trajectories. In one of your performances you refer to the existentialism of Sartre. Which strategies does NG propose to escape the social constraints that have such a profound effect on our life projects? And what difficulties and doubts are inherent in an approach that goes against the current?

NG: The performance you are talking about was a conference/performance realized at FRAC in Marseille in July 2009 (the curator was Dorothee Dupuis). That performance was the result of an experience that involved bathing in the sea everyday and which took place in June and July 2009 while I was in residency at Triangle Marseille.

The performance consisted of reading the diary I called Point Zero that was written during the bathing experience and which describes an experience of depressurization!

Here is an extract:

28 June

Rémi sent me

A sentence from Sartre

About the responsibility of living—

To exist is to project oneself into the future

And lay the values

Man is nothing else than his own project

He only exists in case

He realizes his own project

I bathe everyday

To change state

It's a psycho-mental experience

I'm the scholar and the guinea pig

I measure pressure variations

Mental pressure, social pressure

Auto pressurization



I measure depressurization

I dive

I float, everything's fluid

I am a fish

Awake woken up

I emerge

The world is washed

I can dream

Facing the sea

Yes

I have the right

to dream

Everything I've done started with my creation of NG, which was an attempt to escape a kind of pressure or social constraint. At the beginning of my artistic project there was a sensation of psycho-mental smothering - NG, which is barely a name, is a strategy to appear and disappear, a strategy of escape: "kick and run!"

It's a slogan I mention in one of my sound works GIVE ME A BREAK (2000), which I took from Hakim Bey's Temporary Autonomous Zone.

My strategy is to circulate quickly and this rapid displacement gives me the illusion of escaping the powers that be. My aim is to transform myself through a way of living and the art of living - a

form of transformation Foucault talks about (by "the arts of existence" says Foucault). We have to understand reflected and voluntary practices through which mankind establishes rules of behaviour but also through which they seek to transform themselves, to modify their singular being and to make a piece of art out of their life.

I want to become the magical animal described by Carlos Castaneda - a magical deer we cannot hunt because he doesn't have a fixed place to sleep - an animal that can't be tracked because he doesn't have any habits! That's my aim!

CS: Can you describe your experience of the DIY residency? What was your relationship to the place? Did you feel addressed by the other artists' approaches? It seems that there are affinities between your work and the work of Heike Langsdorf.

NG: Yes I feel close to Heike - or to be more precise, to one of Heike's characters, radical_hope. Even before we met radical_hope had included the character of NG in an exhibition curated by Marthe Van Dessel at Z33 in Hasselt, and had turned her into a descendant of Diogenes the Greek Cynic.

Here is an excerpt

Here is an excerpt from a text written by radical_hope about NG:

"NG makes a direct link: architecture has an immediate influence on how we live, on our understanding of our living conditions. She seems particularly interested in architecture that defies familiar hierarchies, which are, according to her, reinforced by the conventional single-family house, promoting the stable and permanent.

Even though we are caught up in our cities, we can set up something within them, against them, and for them. How can we leave our customized life behind and re-customize it anew? Give up the familiar things and install others.

Test new grounds and our own capacities, be inventive enough to make time for such adventures, be it just for vacation, for one of our artistic projects or for longer periods.

Regardless of how bound to our homes we seem to be, it's an illusion to think we cannot leave them behind. We have to leave our homes instead of being slaves to our homes:

- *sit and drink coffee in the morning -> don't sit and drink coffee in the morning*
- *work on the current project -> don't work on the current project*
- *divide your days according to meal times -> don't eat, drink. Only water*
- *do all kinds of household things -> don't have a household.*
- *do the school / household / work cycle -> don't do this cycle: leave it behind.*
- *travel -> don't just travel: make it a set of self-instructions."*



Thematics

DIY Do it yourself

The reinvestment in DIY as an operating concept by a new generation of artists allows us to shed light on fresh perspectives for contemporary critical thought.

DIY is searching to infiltrate spaces where social and political identities become unstable and their borders unclear.

DIY realizes itself through small, practical experiments, *step by step, moment by moment*. Its aim is to generate ways of doing, procedures for acting in the real that produce momentums of disequilibrium, minor perturbations that challenge our conceptions and our way of experiencing the here and now.

Conversations with Joël Verwimp & Nicolas Y Galeazzi, Heike Langsdorf, Lilia Mestre, NG, Bavo Olbrechts, Piivi Porkoia and Elke Van Campenhout

Bains Connective was founded in 1997 in Vorst/Forest (Brussels) as an artistic laboratory, that offers residencies in the fields of dance, performance, music, visual arts...

Professional artists can apply for a residency, no matter experience, age, discipline or culture.

BC tries to create an open atmosphere where dialogue, experiment and exchange are essential for cross-disciplinary research.

Since 2007 BC organizes Thematics, a two month residency program around a given theme that brings together artists, theorists and organizations to share, participate and create critical response and alternative forms to the existing models of art production.

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