



## Åbäke

### My Lunch with Bianca

**We see Luna cycling in London; we hear street sounds. Luna has a blank expression. We hear her voice commenting on the action, as a narrator would. This narrating voice will be labeled “Luna’s narration” to distinguish it from Luna’s actual words within the action of the story.**

**Luna’s narration:** The life of an artist is tough. It’s not easy, as some people seem to think. You work hard making artwork, and nobody shows your pieces or buys them! At first it doesn’t matter since selling and making are not related, but then you hear that your friend actually lives from his art and jealousy creeps in. You think “well, good for him but my art is not for sale” and you take up other lines of work to try to make a living... I became a teacher... but I teach art even though I cannot make a living from being an artist and if I am being pessimistic, I feel my students will become art teachers, too and so on. I love teaching and always proclaim to whoever wants to hear that it is part of my practice, but the other day a dear friend said: “I bet you say this and you certainly believe it but if your gallery were selling enough, would you really teach?” I laughed and almost screamed “Yes”, but at the same time I wonder.

[Change of scene: Luna has now arrived and is locking up her bicycle. She has three locks, one for the frame and front wheel, one for the back wheel and lastly one for the saddle.] *It is Saturday and I just wanted to be at home, pretending to read a book from the pile of books I own but have not read while in reality I would have just watched some Wire episodes for the second time or even some Portlandia. But I had been trapped by an odd series of circumstances into agreeing to have lunch with a friend I’d not seen for months, or was it years? Her name was Bianca Curtis. She was or even still is a very close friend of mine but despite being neighbours in East London we never saw each other, primarily because she was constantly travelling, even though I had no idea what she did in Japan or wherever since there would never be any production I could see.* [Change of scene: Luna walks into Leila’s café.] *We still bumped into each other here and there but soon enough she disappeared from the openings where we enjoyed getting drunk on the cheap beer and white wine in plastic cups. Her SMS yesterday was a surprise and this lunch invitation even more so. I wondered what had happened and she just said she had a lot to tell me and that it had been too long.*

**Luna:** [To the waitress:] Hello.

**Waitress:** Hello.

[Luna sits down by the window at a table for two]

**Bianca:** Luna!! [Bianca kisses Luna on the cheeks while Luna goes for a hug, creating a slight embarrassment]

**Luna's narration:** [Here we go with the awkward hello in east London, do we hug like Swedes, kiss like the French, one, two, three, starting with which cheek? High five?]

**Bianca:** Well! good to see you at last.

**Luna:** Yes, same to you! [They both laugh and sit.]

**Luna's narration:** [Luna and Bianca start talking; we can hear only parts of the conversation, underneath Luna's narration. It is shot from outside.] I was feeling a bit nervous. So we talked about this and that. She told me a few things about Grotowski, Andy Kaufman, Bourdieu and Louis Malle, people we looked up to.

**Waitress:** [Coming up to them.] If you're ready to order, everything is on the menu board.

**Luna's narration:** I was beginning to realize that the only way to make this lunch fun would be to ask Bianca a few questions. Asking questions always relaxes me. In fact, I sometimes think that my secret profession is a private investigator, a detective. I always enjoy finding out about people. Even if they're in absolute agony, I always find it very interesting.

**Waitress:** Are you ready to order?

**Bianca:** Uh, yes. I will have the comté cornichon sandwich with a glass of prosecco.

**Luna:** Erm, I'll have eggs with sage and some apple juice.

[waitress leaves.]

**Luna:** So, what have you done this summer? I hear you were in Italy this summer. What did you do?

**Luna's narration:** At first, she seemed a little reluctant to go into it. So I just kept asking, and finally she started to answer.

**Bianca:** ... and even though I have been teaching for a year, I still don't know what it is I teach. When people ask me, it goes from a dismissal of what I do as non-serious, you know: "how lucky you are to do such things", to borderline questioning what I do in terms of ethics. I have to say I got into organising workshops when I was a student so the edges are very blurry. When I am pushed to think about it, and that certainly was the case this summer, I need to think about what we are doing. All this Ignorant master and claiming there is no hierarchy is cool but when you are confronted with not knowing what to do or relying on a collective on the spot, it can become stressful.

**Luna:** What do you mean, exactly?

**Bianca:** Well, my old teacher sent me this open call for a workshop in an art centre in Italy where instead of a summer show, they would organise this experiment in art education. I always think of this patronising phrase about teaching someone to fish rather than giving fish to feed people. I don't feel I could be a Shaolin master or some kind of wise man. Anyway, every time there is a possibility for a workshop I want to do it, forgetting that every time there are extremely difficult moments of doubts. It is very much a role-playing game that is so fragile it can collapse at any time. I almost want to say you had to be there as it might sound ridiculous to you, here in this restaurant in London.

**Luna:** But I want to hear what happened, just tell it straight! Who were the students?

**Bianca:** Yes, there were twelve of us and don't get me started on the religious connotations. I have to correct you, though, we were not students but participants. In a way it is a post-master degree of some sort. Some of them had been practicing for five years but one was still a student. The strange thing was to realise we were all from different places in Europe, not one from the same country which made me suspicious about the selection process. I mean, how did they choose? We sent a pdf of our work! Mine was put together in 15 minutes because the deadline was basically on the same evening I got the email. That's what I said: I just got this open call and I only have 15 minutes to show you I'm interested.

**Luna:** How were the others? Nice people?

**Bianca:** The first day it was strange, going back into a classroom situation. The meeting was in Ventimiglia at the border between Italy and France, a small seaside town. It was already 30 degrees and I suspiciously watched people arriving with backpacks: a Swede, a Dutch person, an American etc. It was like some kind of international boot camp slash Benetton joke. My thoughts were: why did you come here, why did they? The curators deliberately or not did not have a lot of information, let alone a website. It worried me a bit but I liked it at the same time, you don't really want some kind of crazy schedule like in schools. For a second I wondered about things like diplomas or even the legitimacy of such a project. I didn't know anybody or know what we were

going to do. Is this a sect? And images of the Viennese activists' orgy came to mind, blood, naked, dead animals, borderline collective sacrifice. When we were all there, a guy who was just slightly older than us said, in a thick Dutch accent: "my name is Andre but you can call me Giorgio. I propose that since the project is in Genoa we walk there." He then gave each one of us a copy of *After the Future*, by Bifo and said: "read it, use it to write or draw, as you wish".

**Luna:** How far is that?

**Bianca:** I don't know exactly but we walked for ten days, in a line, silently. It was very intense in how individual this experience was. On the one hand we instantly became a group, ready to throw ourselves under a car to save each other but most of the silent moments were very introverted. Each day a different person would lead and the rest would be freed from the decision making process. I don't know about the others but when I was walking behind people I could focus on everything except the walk, the street signs, people's faces, the dirty pavement, the endless sky. The walk itself was not military in its pace, but I usually cycle and walking sometimes gives you too much time to think. Because of the heat, we would take a nap from noon to 4pm and then walk until 3am. Very strange to see how nobody is around at those hours even on a Friday or Saturday night.

**Luna:** Did people look at you or say anything?

**Bianca:** It was very different during the day and at night. One Saturday evening I felt a lot of aggression, people were drunk, sure but they were mocking us, even if I didn't understand what they said in Italian. I used to have super long hair and it reminded me of then, when I would get looks or ironic comments wherever I'd go.

**Luna:** Maybe you looked like a religious group? A sect?

**Bianca:** Yeah, I did think about how sects think of themselves as being right, therefore the others are wrong. Perhaps we were sending those signals, I don't know. Anyway I also have to say that I personally thought they were idiots and that what we were doing was important, at least for us. As I said before you have to believe it otherwise you just stop. They are self-imposed rules and we can break them whenever we want. Only that moment is when you don't think it is valid anymore. The belief system crashes. We were lucky to have different references for what we were doing, some thought of it as a critical mimicry of military behaviour for example. For me, it made me think of Jodorowski's *Panic theatre*. For example, we decided to walk in a straight line for a while. When a super tall building, apparently the tallest in the region, was in our way we had to find a way to go to the top, then walk down. Thank God we had Amelia with us, whose super power is that people simply say yes to her. We even had time to drink tea and give a toast to some Ryan Air planes landing nearby. So I was saying Jodo did this, walking in a straight line and someone French mentions

Les Charlots, some mainstream comedians from the 70s doing the same thing as a joke, taking a moped straight over a street sign because someone told them to go straight. Later, this cliff was in our way and we spent the whole day finding some drift wood and broken chairs to create a precarious ladder. Another time we got to the beach but, reluctant to swim without working a bit, half of us buried the others until you could just see their heads and we had haircuts, some for the best, some...

**Luna:** So by the end of the ten days you were like family?

**Bianca:** Well yes, despite being surrounded by people, our isolation created a Lord of the Flies moment and somehow we became very emotional, we would cry at anything, looking at the moon or the prospect of the end of the walk. It helped to have a common goal and there were some rules. For instance everyday one person would have to describe their work without images or words. Some made stone constructions, others performed some mute dances in a supermarket, we were our own audience, it was enough. Having said that, I still don't really know what the others' practices are, I didn't want to google it. You know the beach screening of films they now have everywhere? We would half improvise some performances before the main feature and people thought it was in the programme. I myself was too shy for this and needed more time but I was happy to help out in translating or moving things around. Some of us did not speak English, French or Italian. Andy was funny, he spoke a lot to all of us in Serbian only. I could swear I did understand him and so did the others.

**Luna:** Was Genoa the goal of this workshop?

**Bianca:** Yeah, I forgot to say that this programme was led by two different people, the first half by Andre and then the Wallace collective. When we arrived, we suggested we just continue so the curators, the collective, everybody agreed. Only this time we didn't have a direction so we had to come up with ideas to channel the group. Again, each person was given the leadership, if you can call it that, for a day. A proposal would be made in the morning and we would try our best to do it. Some of the proposals, relying too much on everybody's participation were met with frustration. I myself did not want to do some of the things, simply because it felt I didn't have enough commitment, not because I was against the ideas. Manon decided her participation would exclusively be about helping others to create something.

[Bianca eats a bit of the sandwich, drinks a bit, camera looks around, silence for a few seconds]

**Luna:** You didn't stay in Genoa?

**Bianca:** Just one evening, when we met new people. It was an awkward moment, we were all eating on a tennis court, in the dark, while kids were playing football in the neon lights, next to us. It was both quiet and loud. I wondered how old they were, to

be so active in the middle of the night. That was also when we lost two people for a while, Gùdrun who told us later she got locked out in the stone garden, and we only found her in the morning, having met a ghost or some other presence by the beach.

**Luna:** Hunh!

**Bianca:** Oh, I have a picture. See, this was...oh, yeah: this was a photo I found on the walk, on a road I had never been to before. The guy on the left is my Uncle and the last person on the right, See? We don't know it could be a girl but Gùdrunn saw him, her, on the beach when she was lost. I mean is that a coincidence or what?

**Luna:** God!

**Bianca:** That's what I felt like. That's the state I was in! Everything made some kind of sense in a coincidental way, we were like conspiracy theorists and everything seemed to point towards something. At some point I see this girl, Ai, speaking to the two curators and the art centre director. It looked funny, her in the exact middle of the three others then it struck me: Ai is like an eye and she was in the middle of a triangle or pyramid, talking to Siris. Do you know what the names of the curators are? Marie-Catherine and Ashley! Like the Olsen twins!

**Luna:** What? The kids from the TV show? But what do you mean, there is some kind of conspiracy?

**Bianca:** Well no, of course not, it's just that there is a moment in a group when everything fits in place, especially when you try to go beyond a common goal and try to do your OWN thing, you know? It is so porous, any apparently innocent conversations at a dinner or during lunch feeds all of us even if you want to isolate your ideas. [Bianca pulls out a moleskin sketchbook] I wrote down everything, everything connects, it's frightening but true!

**Luna:** Maybe, rem... [pause] You said two people got lost, who else got lost?

**Bianca:** Mmh, yes, Alain was not lost but he decided to walk in a parallel street, always with us but separated. He will tell you himself but in the process he almost got married.

**Luna:** Ha ha, of course. So where did you go after that?

**Bianca:** During our stay in Genoa some of us who actually lived there felt uncomfortable because somehow they were back home while still in this group. You know, trying to cope with the differences of lives or something. It is exciting to be a tourist in your own town but it is not easy. So Isis offered to show us the city, which is funny because she is a Finnish girl who had never been to Italy. What she knew very well,



however, was how to read the graffiti in the town, they were mostly political or politico-poetic, not so stylised like tags or more territorial graffiti. On the other hand, there was clearly a code of vocabulary, letter shapes or signs.

So here we are, following this girl in the intricate labyrinth of the streets of Genoa. Isis is telling us what this is referring to and how there are similar struggles in different places in Europe and beyond. We talked about how weird it is that the anti-Nazi graffiti first needs the Nazi swastika before it is completed. Is there a way to have a positive sign, one which doesn't need the swastika being barred? At some point we entered some streets which were very dark because the top floor apartments, fifth or sixth floor have balconies that almost touch. At some point Peter says he needs to find a bit of graffiti he saw somewhere: "Libero Gabri". We start at the Christopher Columbus statue, by the train station and some comment on the choice of the figure for this statue. We are not yet looking for Gabri but for the graffiti mentioning him. With this focus, we realise there are many people who need to be freed: Libero Gaelle, Libero Nuvola, Libero Maxime etc. We don't know how old the different slogans are; they look quite fresh but there are no dates. Are they still in prison? Eventually the "Libero Gabri" is in front of us and like a time travelling device it is a right next to another graffiti, in French: "Ne Travaillez jamais" yeah, Debord lived in the south. We feel the need to know if Gabri is around, I imagine him in prison since 2001 as if I wished for a martyr when the G8 took place here but the paint seems newer. We continue walking around and we meet some friends, then other friends and someone announces they know Gabri and they know he will be at a bar later. We are super excited but also wondering what to do when we see him, would he be suspicious? Why would he talk to us? And more importantly, what do we want to know? I felt a bit out of my depth. Curious but also guilty about not knowing enough. Anyway Gabri was free and alive! We went straight to the graffiti and decide to paint over it, in lilac, a default colour. That leaves a new stain on the wall. We celebrate and drink a beer. A few hours later we are with Gabri. He is a bit hesitant. We are too many. He tells us of how he was arrested. How he still is in conditional freedom, later we go and paint the graffiti again, we acted too soon. We are drunk as by then we were drinking Rum...

**Luna:** Well it was good to find him, no? What happened next?

**Bianca:** As I said before, by then all the signs and references were seemingly converging. Whatever someone said, it was added to this conspiracy theory we had worked out, mixing all our interests. Gwen, for example cooked a dish from her mum, realised the recipe had been traveling from Genoa to Haiti via Christopher Columbus, whose statue was the first thing we saw when we arrived. Susan, from Manchester and not used to the sun and temperature of Genoa was constantly listening to Joy Division's Closer album on the cover of which is a picture of a family grave that is in the main cemetery of Genoa. Isis whose tag she invented a while back in Lyon saw it reproduced on the walls of the old town...

**Luna:** [interrupting] Do you mean you were drawn to the place by some kind of external force? That sounds quite far-fetched. All these are coincidences or just post rationalisations. I think it is fun but are you implying you were meant to be meeting, that some exterior forces chose you? But for what?

**Bianca:** I know this is hard to believe but the list is endless. What for? I know it's not as if we had super powers and got together to achieve something specific... Well, just to finish this part of the story Ernesto told us at breakfast that he had dreamt this exact situation a few years ago. He even remembered our faces but in the beginning it was just this feeling of déjà-vu and well, but slowly he knew what we were going to do, somewhat vaguely, it was not as clear as some details were different, our names were different, we were mainly speaking Italian and French in his dreams. The weird thing is that he had them in different episodes, over several years. It was like a TV series, when one thing was over he'd dream the follow-up a few weeks later. We were not doing things specifically but everything we did this summer, it somehow happened even if it wasn't in the same exact order.

**Luna:** Like in an alternate reality?

**Bianca:** Yes. We then listened to something which was very clear to Ernesto. His last dream was an encounter with himself but in the future. An old guy, still looking good but you know, sixty or something. Anyway Ernesto is asking about this workshop. I know it is crazy that he wouldn't ask what the situation of the world was, if we were all speaking Chinese, if Obama had finally fulfilled the hopes, if Palestine was free, all these situations around us. No he just asked what works of art we made as the final outcome of the workshop. And one by one, the old Ernesto described the works, in order of appearance as he slowly walked in the exhibition space. The young Ernesto was super happy, he was being told what the works were. Somehow the descriptions were extremely precise, almost purely objective, their location in the room, the situation of the light, what it was made of. The old Ernesto would not comment on what he felt but just described the things, the temperature in the room, the clothes of the other people present, the smell of air conditioning, everything.

**Luna:** So what were the pieces? I mean it doesn't seem that what you did lends itself to sculptures, did it?

**Bianca:** Well, it turns out the whole description lasted for three hours so you could say there were a lot of pieces in the space. Almost as if in the last hours of the communal experience something had to come out of each person: a movie, an installation, a sculpture, anything. And you know what, as the old Ernesto was describing the show, they were in a dinner setting, in a posh restaurant somewhere in America. The young Ernesto was mostly listening but he remembers the taste of a moray eel as he was trying to figure out who made what.

**Luna:** So you could make this exhibition happen, exactly as described by this guy from the future?

**Bianca:** This is exactly what we said as he was telling us about all the details of the restaurant, the specific manners of the waiters, the chandeliers and other conversations.

**Luna:** so did you create this exhibition?

**Bianca:** We debated on the relevance of doing this, some said it was Ernesto's interpretation and that it was not so much the group's, but I did want to make it happen. At some point we agreed that it was some kind of sign, a direction so if Ernesto was the medium, so be it.

**Luna:** And?

**Bianca:** But then when we agreed and asked him for a precise description of the works he said that he didn't know, he just remembered there WERE descriptions and that the dream did feel three hours long but he could not remember anything from the future.

**Luna:** What? That is frustrating!

**Bianca:** Yeah! I know, I would have loved to make this show from someone's dream.

**Luna:** So, did you guys end up creating a show?

**Bianca:** Well, we all agreed on something which was based on this dream. You know, some of us got really upset that Ernesto could even come up with a work they would have done, forgetting that it was just a dream, a construction. Some other people believed that because we had spent so much time together it was normal that one of us would know what we should all do as a collective. As you know I said my contribution was to help the others to make what they wanted.

Anyway as the end of the workshop was looming we each decided to imagine an exhibition in its very detail and go around telling people about it.

[camera is outside of the café and for a few minutes, we can just see the conversation continue, while street sounds and noises take over] *After three minutes, we see Luna and Bianca hug. Only Luna leaves, she seems puzzled. She unlocks her bike and, without glancing at BIANCA, leaves. The screen fades to black after another minute.*

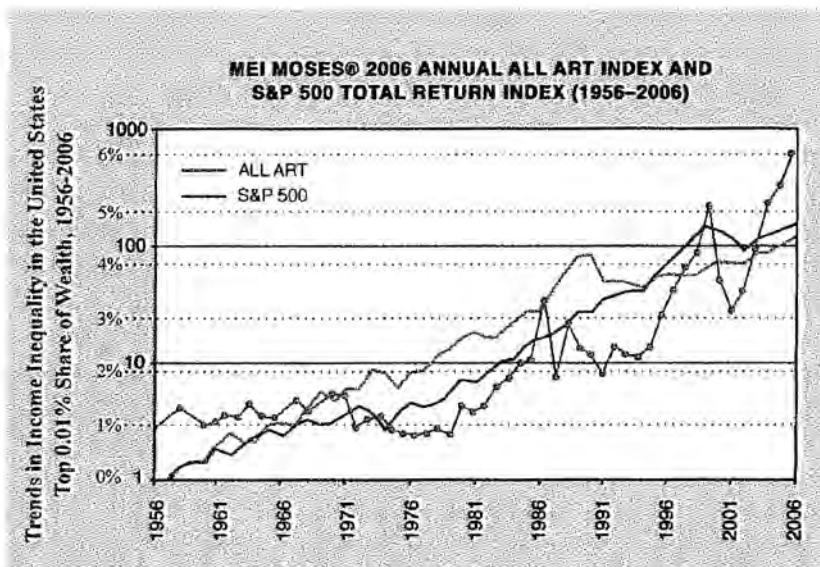
A dialogue based on true events written within the MAXTER PROGRAM 2013 GENOVA - MUSEO D'ARTE CONTEMPORANEA

Villa Croce "After the Future", curated by Anna Daneri, Ilaria Gianni and Ilaria Bonacossa, 4 - 25 July 2013

## ANDREA FRASER

## L'1%, C'EST MOI

Figure 1: Andrea Fraser, "Index", published anonymously in *Artforum*, Summer 2011, p. 431. Produced for "24 Advertisements", a project by Jacob Fabricus, with design assistance by Santiago Pérez Gomes-de Silva, Studio Manuel Raeder.



How do the world's leading collectors earn their money? How do their philanthropic activities relate to their economic operations? And what does collecting art mean to them and how does it affect the art world? If we look at the incomes of this class, it is conspicuous that their profits are based on the growth of income inequality all over the world.

as the fourth richest man in the world with \$41 billion, controls LVMH, which, despite the debt crisis, reported a sales growth of 13 percent in the first half of 2011.<sup>2</sup> Hedge fund manager John Arnold, who got his start at Enron – where he received an \$8 million bonus just before it col-

**This redistribution of capital in turn has a direct influence on the art market: the greater the discrepancy between the rich and the poor, the higher prices in this market rise. The situation, it would seem, urgently calls for the development of alternatives to the existing system.**

Who are the collectors of contemporary art today? The ARTnews 200 Top Collectors list is an obvious place to start. Near the top of the alphabetical list is Roman Abramovich, estimated by Forbes

lapsed – recently gave \$150,000 to an organization seeking to limit public pensions.<sup>3</sup> MoMA, MoCA and LACMA trustee Eli Broad is worth \$5.8 billion and was a board member and major shareholder of AIG. Steven A. Cohen, estimated to be worth \$8 billion, is the founder of SAC Capital Advisors, which is under investigation for insider trading.<sup>4</sup> Guggenheim trustee Dimitris Daskalopoulos, who is also chairman of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises, recently called for “modern private initiative” to save the failing Greek economy

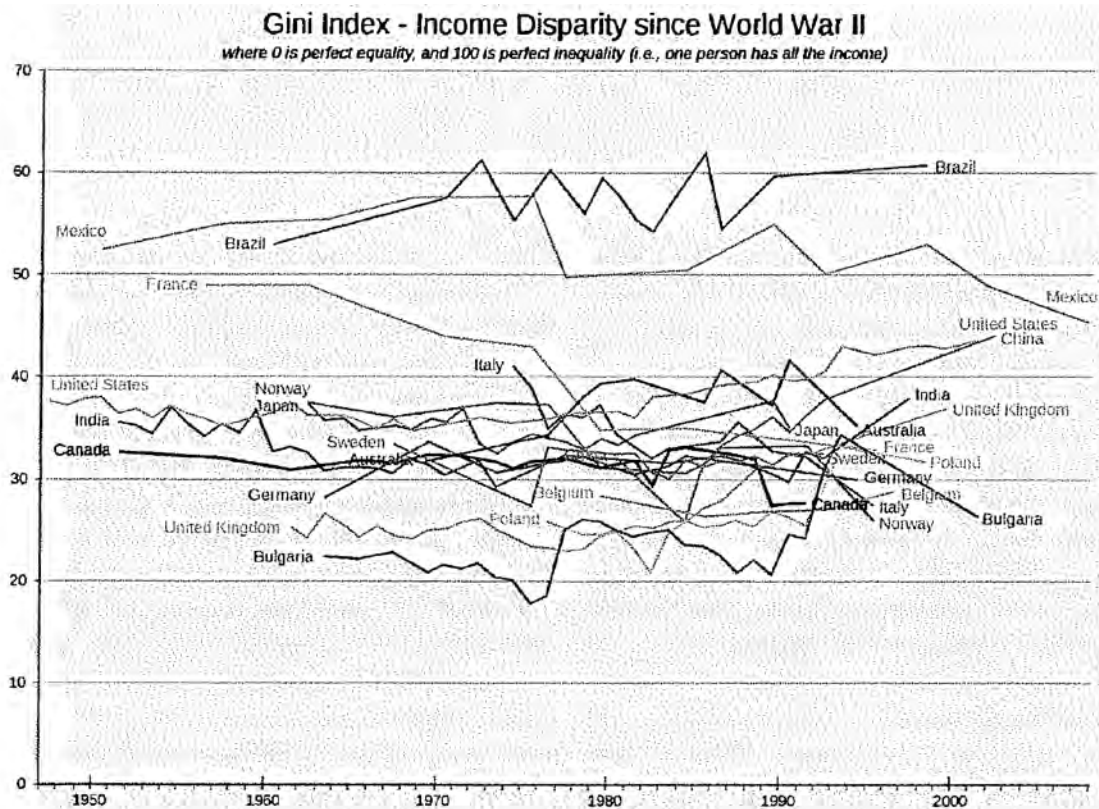


Figure 2

to be worth \$13.4 billion, who admitted paying billions in bribes for control of Russian oil and aluminum assets.<sup>1</sup> Bernard Arnault, listed by *Forbes* in 1986 by William J. Baumol. Baumol analyzed “several centuries of price data” and came to the conclusion that the real rate of return on art investments was basically zero – hardly an encouragement for art collectors.<sup>16</sup> In 2002, two New York University-based economists, Jiangping Mei and Michael Moses, claimed to prove him wrong<sup>17</sup> and began publishing an analysis of art auction results that showed art outperforming many other investments. This was the beginning of the Mei Moses Art Index (as well as their art consulting business, Beautiful Asset Advisors, Figure 1), which quickly began to appear on art investment websites and in publications like *Forbes*, playing a significant role in the development of the art investment industry.

Finally, a couple of years ago, a group of economists began to look at these comparative indexes not simply for evidence of art’s investment value, ever income inequality rises quickly. This seems exactly what we witnessed during the last period of strong art price appreciation, 2002–2007.<sup>18</sup>

A quick look the Gini index (Figure 2), which tracks income disparity worldwide, shows that the countries with the most significant art booms of the past two decades have also experienced the greatest rise in inequality: the United States, Britain, China and, home to the most recent boom, India. In the US, at least, the steep increase in inequality has been reported widely for years, with economists like Paul Krugman and fellow Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz sounding alarms in the mainstream press. Even *The Economist* has shown concern. Recent articles have focused on new data showing that the top 1

from a “bloated and parasitic” “patronage-ridden state”.<sup>5</sup> Frank J. and Lorenzo Fertitta were the third and fourth highest paid men in the US in but for an explanation of its price structure. William N. Goetzmann, Luc Renneboog, and Christophe Spaenjers suspected that equity market returns actually have a direct impact on art prices by increasing the buying power of the wealthy. So they compared art prices to income measures. As they report in their paper “Art and Money”, their analysis did not find a relationship between art returns and “overall income variables (such as GDP or total personal income)” but only with income inequality: art prices do not go up as a society as a whole becomes wealthier, but only when income inequality increases. Their analysis suggests that “a one percentage point increase in the share of total income earned by the top 0.1 percent triggers an increase in art prices of about 14 percent”. They conclude: “It is indeed the money of the wealthy that drives art prices. This implies that we can expect art booms when—and other traditionally art-supporting groups out of the market. More broadly, it produces a distortion in the perception of wealth, as members of the top 20, 10, and even 1 percent may no longer perceive themselves as affluent.

The art market boom of the past decade has been associated widely with the rise of HNWIS (high net worth individuals, Figure 3) or ultra-HNWIS (people worth over \$1 million or \$30 million respectively), terms popularized by the World Wealth Reports that Merrill Lynch and CapGemini began releasing in 1997. These reports show the total wealth of HNWIS exploding from \$19.1 trillion in 1997 to \$42.7 trillion in 2010. Art+Auction recently celebrated trends documented in the 2011 report: the number of HNWIS world-

percent now take 25 percent of the income and control 40 percent of the wealth in the US, up from 12 and 33 percent 25 years ago, while the income of the bottom 99 percent has not risen since 1993. This brings inequality in the US back to 1929 levels and close to the current level of Mexico.<sup>19</sup>

With regard to the art market, however, focusing on the 1 percent is misleading. The threshold for 1 percent status in the US in 2008 was an annual gross income of \$380,354 – hardly the makings of a significant collector. It is only at the 1 percent threshold of \$1,803,585 that we begin to encounter our patron class. As Goetzmann et. al. note, art prices, like real estate prices in desirable cities, rise with income inequality as the wealthy outbid each other for rarefied properties. Steeply increasing top incomes set off an

wide, which almost doubled between 1997 and 2007 from 5.9 to more than 10.9 million, has recovered from its 2008 dip to pre-crisis levels; best of all, HNWI demand for “investments of passion” – including cars, boats, jets (29 percent), jewelry, gems, watches (22 percent) and art (22 percent) – has also rebounded!<sup>21</sup>

But it is not only the market-based sector of the art world that has benefited from the rise of HNWIs. Since public arts funding has mostly declined in Europe and North America since the 1980s, it must be assumed that, directly and indirectly, this increasingly concentrated private wealth has also fueled the enormous expansion in the past few decades of museums, biennial exhibitions, studio art and art related degree programs, art publications, art residencies and awards, etc.

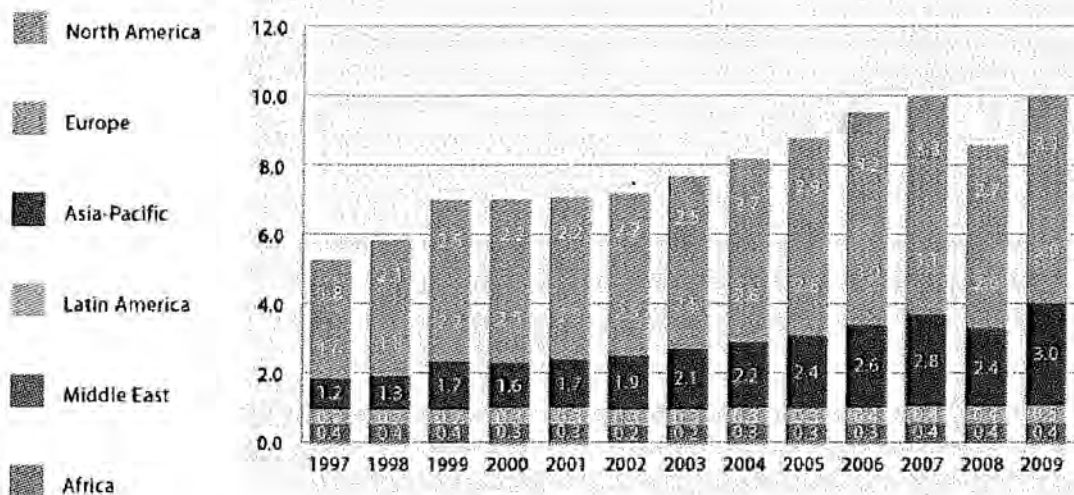


Figure 3: Number of HNWIs per region (in millions) / Anzahl der HNWIs nach Region (in Millionen)

equally steep inflation in the goods and services associated with affluence<sup>20</sup> resulting in a down-classing of formerly affluent income levels. In the art world, this has effectively priced professionals political and legal assaults on organized labor that led to falling wages and, together with deregulation, removed any checks on skyrocketing executive compensation. These politics have been supported by a hugely successful culture war that has effectively identified class hierarchy and privilege with educational and cultural capital, rather than economic capital, for much of the US population outside of urban centers. It is also clear that financial deregulation played a major role in the subprime crisis, as did the cheap credit that propped up consumer spending and the real estate market as real wages declined. And it is also clear that the sovereign debt crisis that has followed the subprime crisis will only further increase inequality as austerity measures are implemented to protect banks and bondholders. The pain of cuts to cultural budgets is hard to compare to the impoverishment inflicted on millions by mass foreclosures and job loss; the bankruptcy of pension plans; cuts in public sector wages, in health care, in support for the unemployed, for students; with steep increases in the cost of education, etc. Anyway, we can always turn to HNWIS, who continue to privatize profits at pre-crisis rates. And as our survey of Top Collectors shows, many of our patrons are actively watches. European museums have the potential to be the birthplace of a new art field that could emerge from this split, where new forms of autonomy can develop: not as secessionist "alternatives" that exist only in the grandiose enactments and magical thinking artists and theorists, but as fully institutionalized structures, which,

In the US at least, the causes of rising inequality are relatively clear: anti-tax and anti-government politics that reversed progressive taxation and led to corporate and financial deregulation; working to preserve the political and financial system that will keep their wealth, and inequality, growing for decades to come.

Except to stalwart adherents of trickle-down theory, it must be abundantly clear by now that what has been good for the art world has been disastrous for the rest of the world.

How can we continue to rationalize our participation in this economy? In the United States, it is difficult to imagine any arts organization or practice that can escape it. The private nonprofit model – which almost all US museums as well as alternative art organizations exist within – is dependent on wealthy donors and has its nineteenth century origins in the same anti-tax and anti-government ideology that led to the current situation: the principle that private initiatives are better suited to fulfill social needs than the public sector and that wealth is most productively administered by the wealthy. Even outside of institutions, artists engaged in community-based and social practices that aim to provide public benefit in the context of budget cuts may be just what George H. W. Bush called for when he envisioned volunteers and community organizations spreading like "a thousand points of lights" in the wake of his rollback in public spending.<sup>22</sup>

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- 12 Azam Ahmed, "Dealbook: Writing Again, Third Point's Loeb Takes Swipe at Obama", in: *New York Times*, July 24, 2011.
- 13 Charles V. Bagli and Christine Haughney, "Wide Fallout in Failed Deal for Stuyvesant Town", in: *New York Times*, January 21, 2010.



with the "properly social magic of institutions",<sup>26</sup> will be able to produce, reproduce, and reward specific and, let's hope, more equitably derived and distributed forms of capital.

Thanks to Sven Lütticken for his valuable comments on drafts of this text.

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#### Notes

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- 21 Roman Kraeussl, "Following their Passions", in: *Art+Auction*, Summer 2011.
- 22 George H. W. Bush, "Inaugural Address", January 20, 1989.
- 23 I began much of this research in the spring of 2010, when *Artforum* asked me to contribute to their summer issue on museums. *Artforum* declined to publish the text I submitted, which detailed the involvement of MoMA trustees in the subprime crisis. That research developed into an initiative called Artigarchy, an interactive web-based data platform that would track the political and economic affiliations of top collectors and trustees. I have yet to find an art organization willing to take it on.
- 24 See Andrea Fraser, "Speaking of the Social World ...", in: *Texte zur Kunst*, Vol. 21, No. 81, March 2011, pp. 153–156.
- 25 Quoted in Charlotte Higgins, "Will philanthropists save the arts?", in: *The Guardian*, October 21, 2010.
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## **Guillaume Désanges**

### **Tractatus logico-artisticus<sup>1</sup>**

**1** - L'art est la totalité de ce qui n'est pas autre chose que l'art.

**1.1** - Cette définition en creux implique que l'art peut a priori accueillir ce qui n'est pas approuvé ou reconnu par les autres champs de production de formes et de pensées.

**1.2** - L'art bénéficie d'un certain état d'exception.

**1.21** - S'il opère dans un régime de suspension de certains impératifs en termes juridiques, économiques et même esthétiques, qui ont cours dans la plupart des autres activités.

**1.22** - Cette suspension plus ou moins acceptée, et plus ou moins acceptable, n'oblige pas l'art de toute responsabilité, mais en crée de nouvelles.

**2** - Dans l'art contemporain, "conventionnel" est un terme négatif, souvent injurieux. Ce qui est conventionnel est artistiquement faible, vulgaire, à rejeter.

**2.1** - La convention est un pacte arbitraire, limité dans le temps et l'espace, qui implique l'existence d'une autorité préalable.

**2.12** - S'étant progressivement et douloureusement émancipé de son cantonnement initial dans l'industrie et le travail manuel de commande (les arts serviles) pour atteindre, à la Renaissance, la grâce spirituelle et subjective des arts libéraux<sup>2</sup>, l'art visuel n'a cessé de refouler cette origine honteuse en affirmant son insoumission à toute autorité de régulation. Il se plaît à exécrer la tradition, l'académisme, la normalisation. Ce caractère contestataire a connu son apogée avec la notion d'avant-gardes, qui constitue l'horizon d'une pratique plastique fondée sur l'originalité, l'innovation et l'inouï. Un fantasme de dynamique inchoative qui a encore cours aujourd'hui, dans le milieu de l'art aussi bien que dans l'imaginaire populaire.

**2.13** - Toute convention entend déterminer par avance des obligations, des règles ou des manières de faire, et de ce fait anticiper les termes de la transaction et de

la communication entre acteurs sociaux, pour éviter les accidents. Or, l'art proscrit toute idée de réponse à une situation anticipée, tout conformisme à des standards, et entend précisément créer des accidents et des déviations dans le cours normal des choses. Il est l'espace de la violation des politiques établies du regard et de la sensibilité.

**2.14** - La convention est un outil de contrôle consensuel qui s'oppose au chaos naturel. Or l'art doit rester hors de contrôle.

**2.15** - Pour être effective, la convention doit être adoptée par le plus grand nombre, alors que l'art opère dans une logique de la différenciation et reste irréductiblement minoritaire. Aucune œuvre ne peut ni ne doit constituer un modèle générique de la pratique artistique.

**2.2** - En philosophie analytique, les deux figures exemplaires qui éclairent le concept de convention sont le langage et l'argent : deux modes de transactions arbitraires qui nécessitent une devise d'échange (les mots, la monnaie) qui n'a d'autre valeur en soi que cette fonction d'équivalence. La convention est toujours faible, c'est le plus petit dénominateur commun de l'échange, qui vaut infiniment moins que ce qu'il représente.

**2.21** - Il est frappant de constater comment l'évolution de l'art au XXe siècle n'a justement cessé de défier ces deux conventions - le langage et l'argent - qui restent aujourd'hui encore abordées avec méfiance, voire une certaine gêne. D'où ces tentatives de déconstruire ou dévier les conventions du langage, des poèmes Dada<sup>3</sup> et surréalistes aux Mesostics de John Cage, des bégayements de Bruce Nauman aux jeux linguistiques ironiques d'Art & Language. Par ailleurs, la modernité, relayée par l'art conceptuel, s'est attachée à abolir de l'aura de l'objet unique en menaçant volontairement les fondements de sa valeur marchande, des multiples readymade de Marcel Duchamp aux néons industriels de Dan Flavin. Parfois en vain, il est vrai.

**2.22** - Conséquemment, se maintient dans l'art un mépris pour la clarté sémantique et la réussite économique. De fait, en termes rhétoriques et financiers l'art contemporain entend se différencier, volontairement dans l'excès et l'aberration, des autres champs d'activités.

**2.3** - On pourrait donc dire que l'opposition aux conventions constitue l'un des motifs, pour ne pas dire l'un des moteurs de l'art contemporain.

**2.4** - L'art refuse aujourd'hui de se considérer comme une discipline professionnelle figée, organisée et régulée. D'où sa fascination inconsciente pour tout ce qui vient d'ailleurs et tout ce qui en repart<sup>4</sup>. D'où son attirance pour l'altérité, pour ce qui vient contester son identité en tant que milieu. L'art contemporain se rêve volontiers comme lieu de passage, port d'attache, terre de greffe sans racines.

**2.5** - Dans sa relation au savoir, par exemple, l'art reste insoumis à toute logique cognitive, didactique ou édifiante et pourtant, il continue à se nourrir de connaissances autant qu'il en produit lui-même. On pourrait donc dire qu'il opère à l'intérieur du champ de la connaissance sans se soumettre aux conventions admises dans l'usage, la production et la transmission de cette connaissance. C'est l'un de ses plus intéressants terrains d'investigation aujourd'hui.

**3** - L'art est saisi à l'intérieur d'un champ plus vaste qui est ce qu'on a coutume d'appeler "le monde de l'art", où sphère professionnelle et sphère sociale sont particulièrement liées.

**3.1** - Selon le philosophe David Lewis, toute convention est convention sociale.

**3.12** - À l'échelle du monde de l'art, il y a donc bien des conventions, fondées sur l'acceptation tacite de certains usages, plutôt que sur des règles édictées et manifestes. Ce sont des conventions que je qualifierai de "sourdes", qui ne s'assument pas en tant que telles, et qui intègrent en elles-mêmes les possibilités de leur contestation.

**3.13** - En repliant les deux étalons conventionnels que sont l'argent et le langage sur le "monde de l'art", on pourrait dire que ses deux principales sources conventionnelles sont le marché de l'art et la critique d'art, qui tous les deux contestent la tentative de l'art lui-même d'échapper à toute normalisation langagière et économique.

**3.12** - Pour emprunter une expression de l'artiste Thomas Hirschhorn, c'est d'abord à l'échelle de ce "spectre d'évaluation" (critiques, historiens de l'art, curateurs, galeries, collectionneurs, etc.), qu'un certain type de conventions s'intègre dans le champ de l'art. Ces conventions, qui ne sont par principe pas fondées sur la rationalité et la nécessité, sont prioritairement un moyen (peut-être inconscient) de se reconnaître, de se re-territorialiser, de circonscrire une identité et des frontières, là où elles sont par principe refusées.

**3.13** - En travaillant dans le monde de l'art, je me suis aperçu progressivement qu'il était un champ intrinsèquement et inconsciemment "conservateur", dans sa volonté d'échapper même aux conventions. Et aussi, je me suis aperçu qu'il allait avec tout un mode de vie, des goûts, des centres d'intérêts, de codes culturels communs, qui entendent se différencier du *mainstream*, et qui sont très prégnants, même si la plupart de ses acteurs le nie. Pour plaisanter, je désigne mes amis extérieurs à ce champ comme des "civils". Comme tout secteur, donc, le milieu de l'art fonctionne sur des conventions qui se modifient à travers le temps, incluant un vocabulaire, des attitudes, des comportements sociaux. Comme le dit l'artiste Dora García, "L'art est pour tout le monde, mais seule l'élite le sait".

**3.2** - En tant que curateur, j'ai progressivement appris qu'il fallait accrocher les œuvres à 1m50 du sol, repeindre les murs en blanc avant et après chaque expo-

sition, organiser un vernissage avec des cartons d'invitations au titre mystérieux, rédiger un communiqué de presse en quelques lignes qui cite certains mots comme déterritorialisation, rhizome, "se joue des stéréotypes féminins" ou "le centre et la périphérie" mais éviter de parler de beauté, du public et de Clément Greenberg. En tant que visiteur, je n'ai toujours pas compris pourquoi il était interdit de prendre des photos, de rentrer avec un sac, de garder ses chaussures sur la moquette, ou de se pencher par dessus la rambarde intérieure du musée Guggenheim. La visite d'une exposition dans les salles cliniquement blanches d'un grand musée ressemble de plus en plus à un itinéraire obligé, ultra codifié, où les gardiens passent leur temps à nous interdire certains comportements naturels. De fait, il y a un étrange rapport, presque masochiste, à la fréquentation très contrainte de certaines expositions.

**4** - La critique d'art est un secteur où des conventions tacites et invisibles s'appliquent particulièrement.

**4.1** - En 2006, j'ai écrit un texte qui s'appelle "Tristes Topiques, la critique d'art est un non lieu"<sup>5</sup>, qui décrivait une certaine critique d'art comme un geste automatisé de la pensée. Une pratique au premier abord intimidante (pour qui n'est pas universitaire, de surcroît) mais dont on se rend vite compte que la répétition formelle et conceptuelle (une sémantique précise et récurrente, l'utilisation partagée d'un corpus de références limité, le formatage des styles, l'*international touch* de certaines publications) la transforment en espace d'investigation en trompe l'œil, territoire déterritorialisé mais extrêmement conventionnel et confortable pour qui a l'habitude de le parcourir. Un positionnement indéterminé à la sémantique surdéterminée, impersonnelle et souvent interchangeable.

**4.12** - Ce texte a déplu à certains qui m'ont accusé de "cracher dans la soupe", bien que mon but n'était ni de régler des comptes, ni de m'exclure de cette critique de la critique d'art, mais de rêver tout haut d'une critique qui muscle l'art par sa propre énergie au lieu de le servir avec neutralité, qui s'attache à saisir la polysémie illimitée de chaque œuvre, en inventant de nouveaux protocoles d'écriture pour battre au même rythme (disjonctif) que son sujet.

**4.2** - La critique d'art est un état d'exception qui opère trop souvent dans une suspension de l'intelligence et de l'imagination. Elle obéit trop à des conventions, dans le sens d'un maintien de la stabilité d'un système (sémantique), d'une soumission à des précédents tacites. Elle opère selon une dynamique de répliation et d'imitation.

**4.3** - Il y a un langage lié à l'art, auquel nous ne saurions échapper, et que nourrit la critique d'art, mais qui n'est pas l'art. L'art que j'aime entend rester insoumis à toute logique discursive préalable. Il crée du langage plus qu'il n'en use. Ce pourrait être la grande leçon de Marcel Duchamp : proposer une alternative au langage qu'aucun langage ne saurait saisir, ni rattraper. Le Grand Verre a été l'objet d'une infinité de propos et commentaires (et en premier ceux de l'artiste lui-même), sans être lui-même discursif. Voir la conférence de Duchamp sur l' "acte de création".

**4.31** - L'art est une forme d'expression sans langage. Un ensemble de signes sans structure ni syntaxe. Un fait que la critique d'art semblerait venir contester en s'efforçant de replier le langage sur des formes artistiques. À moins que cette fonction ne soit ontologiquement suscitée par l'art : la possibilité de l'infini commentaire, toujours insuffisant, imprécis, n'atteignant jamais son sujet, et néanmoins créant de la pensée.

**4.32** - C'est la "force nucléaire" de l'art : d'infimes frottements qui suscitent de formidables explosions de sens et d'émotions. De la création d'énergie à partir de presque rien, et dont les effets agissent à très long terme.

**4.4** - La critique d'art partage avec la pratique psychanalytique une manière de complexifier des objets simples et simplifier des notions complexes. Un mouvement créatif et spéculatif d'obscurcissement-clarification en double bind.

**5** - L'art en tant que création qui entend dépasser l'état de nature via l'artifice, et se place à l'intérieur d'une histoire, s'apparente lui-même en partie à un régime de la convention.

**5.1** - Par une mécanique de mise en abyme, le refus même de la convention ou son détournement devient une position manifeste, statuée et répétée et, donc finalement conventionnelle, au sens où c'est à partir d'elle que se pense une partie de l'art.

**5.12** - Ce sont même les exemples les plus manifestes d'anticonformisme et de marginalité esthétique que l'histoire de l'art retient comme ses référents privilégiés : Cervantès, Shakespeare ou Sterne en littérature. Goya, Malevitch ou Marcel Duchamp dans les arts.

**5.** - La volonté de l'art de ne jamais se figer en un champ, d'échapper à ses propres pré-supposés et de défier sans cesse ses frontières restera limitée par le fait que, comme le dit Marlène Zarader<sup>6</sup> à propos de la philosophie, "on ne saute pas par-dessus son ombre".

**5.21** - 'art, depuis les avant-gardes, entend se développer en dehors des règles établies et de l'académisme, et dans le même temps ne cherche qu'à repartir de son histoire, lorgnant sur son passé dans la critique ou dans la célébration, affirmant sa propre place dans l'histoire. En ce sens, il est conservateur.

**5.3** - S'il y a un devenir normatif de la convention, les conventions de l'art n'entendent pas être normatives. Comme les pirates organisent précisément leur société, l'art circonscrit des usages et des conventions propres qui lui permettent de continuer à se développer dans la marge et l'alternative. Carl Schmitt : "L'état d'exception se distingue toujours de l'anarchie et du chaos et, dans un sens juridique, on y trouve encore un ordre, quand bien même il ne s'agit pas d'un ordre juridique."<sup>7</sup>

**5.31** - Cette relation du désordre à l'ordre redouble le combat des deux pulsions artistiques essentielles révélées par Nietzsche dans la "Naissance de la tragédie" : l'ivresse (dionysiaque) contre le rêve (apollinien). La jouissance furieuse et cruelle de l'immédiat rendue possible et intelligible par la distance interprétative de l'illusion et de la sublimation. Une tension qui justifie les conventions de la tragédie grecque.

**5.32** - Dans son absolue marginalité, l'artiste peut donc suivre les conventions qu'il s'impose à lui-même, comme Robinson sur son île. Elles consistent à se créer un cadre, une économie et une discipline de travail qui est autonome, strictement individuelle, et doit rester liée à des nécessités artistiques et non para-artistiques.

**5.33** - La mise en œuvre d'une telle convention minoritaire, arbitraire et sans source établie, qui se confond avec une discipline et un système personnels, est peut-être finalement ce qui est le plus intéressant dans l'art.

**5.34** - L'art ne détruit pas tant les conventions qu'il les détricote et qu'il les remodèle. En ce sens, il est actif et non pas réactif. Les aphorismes de Duchamp ne déconstruisent pas tant le langage, qu'ils proposent une nouvelle convention de langage dans l'imperfection, l'indécision, le ratage sémantique. Les *Stoppage Étalon* ne sont pas une nouvelle forme de mesure mais une autre mesure, déviante de l'étalon. Raymond Roussel invente moins un langage qu'il ne détourne la langue via ses propres conventions littéraires arbitraires et invisibles.

**5.4** - Toutes ces conventions sont elles-mêmes fondées sur une méta-convention tacite et fondamentale avec le spectateur, qui est peut-être la découverte la plus importante de l'art du XXe siècle.

**6** - En tant que curateur et critique d'art, je n'ai jamais eu l'impression de briser les cadres, puisque par hasard, je ne connaissais pas les cadres.

**6.1** - J'accepte les conventions de l'art et celles du *curating*, mais je ne cherche pas à les connaître.

**6.2** - J'ai organisé une exposition dans le noir, où chaque œuvre était éclairée ou activée l'une après l'autre<sup>8</sup>. J'ai fabriqué des substituts aux œuvres d'art que je voulais montrer : images scannées, photocopiées<sup>9</sup>, œuvres dessinées, décrites, gestes réinterprétés par des acteurs<sup>10</sup>, des ombres chinoises<sup>11</sup>, etc. J'ai reconstitué une histoire de la performance avec des enfants<sup>12</sup>. J'ai montré des objets hétérogènes à l'art : des livres, des minéraux, des jeux, des banderoles politiques, etc.

**6.21** - Ce faisant, on m'a parfois critiqué ou félicité pour briser certaines conventions. Mais ce n'est pas le cas. Briser les conventions, c'est leur donner trop d'importance. Ce que je veux faire, c'est opposer le pragmatisme à la convention. Prendre des décisions qui sont nécessaires, même si elles sont scabreuses, et pas en opposition à un modèle.

**6.22** - J'ai organisé des expositions classiques, présentant des œuvres d'art dans

un espace, sans protocole formel. Dans ce cas, l'expérimentation peut résider dans la sélection et l'association d'œuvres d'art, dans la tension entre des idées et des œuvres qui s'y dérobent sans cesse.

**6.3** - Dès qu'on sort de la convention dans la critique d'art et le *curating*, on est accusé de jouer les artistes, comme si les artistes étaient les seuls à pouvoir et devoir parfois dépasser les règles de leur champ. Les questions de la création et du "génie", mais aussi du risque et de l'engagement se posent aussi chez les curateurs et chez les critiques que j'admire.

**6.4** - La convention, le cadre, sont rassurants. Les ignorer, c'est plonger dans l'inconnu, dans la peur.

**6.41** - Mon premier souvenir de l'art contemporain s'est fait sous le régime de l'ineffable, de l'incompréhension, de la terreur, et l'art que j'aime reste sous un régime de l'incertain, du déséquilibre, du malaise.

**6.5** - Dans ma pratique de curateur et de critique, s'il me faut un repère, il est à deux dimensions : l'amour et l'intelligence. Ce sont les deux horizons qui déterminent mes décisions, même si je ne les atteins jamais.

**6.6** - J'accepte d'être plongé dans la convention mais je lutte le plus honnêtement possible contre l'influence, positive ou négative, engageante ou repoussante, de celle-ci. Et en contrepoint, je tente de ne pas aimer cette lutte. Savoir "faire la révolte sans l'aimer" (Guy Debord)

**7** - Sur ce dont on ne peut parler, l'art est incapable de garder le silence (tant mieux). La critique d'art non plus (la preuve).

**Guillaume Désanges, 2010, Originellement publié dans le catalogue "Before everything", Madrid: CA2M, Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo**



**Notes :**

1 Ce texte de commande sur la notion de convention pour CA2M (Madrid, Espagne), prend la forme d'un pastiche du *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* de Ludwig Wittgenstein, référence récurrente dans la partie de la philosophie analytique qui étudie la notion de convention. Il est fondé sur une tentative de circonscrire les possibilités de discours sur un sujet.

2 À ce sujet, on se reportera sur l'ouvrage *Les Enfants de Saturne*, de Rudolf et Margot Wittkower

3 Richard Huelsenbeck : "Je lis des vers qui ne visent rien de moins que se passer de la langue. [...] Je ne veux pas des mots que d'autres ont trouvés. [...] Je veux mon propre non-sens, et des voyelles et des consonnes pour l'exprimer. [...]"

4 Voir la fascination récente pour des figures d'artistes ayant quitté les arts visuels, comme Charlotte Posenenske, Lee Lozano ou Kathryn Bigelow.

5 Texte initialement publié en anglais in *Report (Not Announcement)*, en collaboration avec e-flux, curaté par Binna Choi, puis en français dans *Howard* (journal édité par François Curlet, en 2005), puis en espagnol dans le catalogue de l'*Evento Téorico* de la biennale de la Havane en 2009.

Texte intégral disponible sur le site : [www.guillaumedesanges.com](http://www.guillaumedesanges.com)

6 Marlène Zarader, *L'Être et le Neutre*, Editions Verdier, 2001

7 Carl Schmitt, cité par Giorgio Agamben, in *L'Etat d'exception*, éditions du Seuil, 2003

8 *Pick-Up*, 2004

9 Jiri Kovanda vs rest of the World, 2006

10 "A History of Performance" in *20 minutes*, 2004

11 *Signs and Wonders*, 2009

12 *Child's Play*, 2009

