

Showing Without Telling

Burger COLLECTION



SHOWING WITHOUT TELLING

The Seminar *Showing Without Telling: An Alternative Approach to the Trans-Cultural System of Art?*

was held in Brissago, Switzerland

15. September – 19. September 2011

The following abstracts by the respective participants provide a short overview about the talk they gave during the seminar and their specific topics of discussion.

1 – Bani Abidi

A News Free Life

Bani Abidi discusses the tribulations of being a Pakistani today. Not the political and social problems that surround her, but the peril of the TV news ticker that scrolls fast and furiously across world imagination and 'articulates' not only events, but entire countries and civilizations. What happens to knowledge production and gathering when current news becomes the primary perpetrator of thought and curiosity?

Bani Abidi will talk about the aspect of local nuances and narratives in her work, and how she and others struggle to maintain an inner equilibrium despite an aggressive preference for a certain kind of 'explanatory' and topically political art from an international art world.

2 – Stephen Ching-kiu Chan

Performing Daily Life Through Contemporary Museum Practices: Plus or Minus Culture

How do we face the challenge today of 'post-Museum' as a 'utopian display institution' (Chris Bruce)? As we all know, that institution not only gets more gigantic, multi-functional, and trans-cultural, but it also triggers the re-invention of a metamorphic social space in which the visitor's (consumerist) practices as well as subjectivity are at stake. Everywhere, curatorial work gives way to this or that line of the mega urban project. If the position of a critical visitor to the displayed city is still possible, one must ask how relevant, authentic and effective the changing visitor experience can be, from the very perspective of the daily realities they live in.

In Hong Kong today, 'M+' is a part of the 40-hectre West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) mega-project that promises to bring top-notch culture to the metropolis, branded years ago as the World City of Asia. M+ curator Lars Nittve, formerly of Tate Modern, promises that the 'plus' to the project would extend the conventional work of art and culture to visitor education and interactivity. With the WKCD site still an empty spread of reclaimed land lying by the spectacular Victoria Harbour, it appears that under the city's cultural policy the original Museum 'proper' would not be enough for us, and we want more in so many years. Hence the plus?

In this talk, I shall start with the implication of all this from the view point of the convenor of a civic alliance People's Panel for West Kowloon, but turn to focus on a completely opposite approach and attempt compared to the M+ imaginary: the Museum-minus project.

Launched by a small group of local artists, academics and social activists the Museum-minus: the Hong

Kong Today Exhibits is a bottom-up cultural project committed to transforming the museum visitor experience, and transgressing the borders of artistic contemplation and political action. It aims to address social issues and challenge the cultural-political imagination of the public through curatorial practices. Drawing on the innovation of the responsive and participatory museum, it stresses the need for inter-subjective communication and opens up through its museum practice a reflective pedagogic space for questioning how hegemony functions in our culture. The project receives no front-end public funding support, unlike the M+, but works to display and question, at the community level, the social narratives available in the city. With a critical museum pedagogy it organizes its exhibits by merging politics (the play of power in all its complexities) with culture (design, interpretation and imagination) in an attempt to underline the specificity of culture with the power relations that make it works, as these have always been instituted in the everyday life of the people.

The inaugural display in 2011 focuses on the theme of real estate hegemony in Hong Kong. It puts to play, through a curatorial space that mimics a model flat for sale on the market, the effective work of hegemonic forces dominating our lived social realities. By allowing the visitors to perform themselves (as potential buyers of a demonstration flat) through interacting with the curatorial space (and the guide who plays the agent showing them the flat/show), the museum-minus experience poses challenge to the prevailing official social discourses, as well as the hegemonic relationships that implicate their own participation, consensus, and compliance in the process. The display works by interactive performance, as it facilitates visitors to see how power works side by side with populist aesthetics and consumerist pleasure. In performative acts they create their own space in the museum minus design for critical thinking and imagination. For the development of educational materials on 'Hong Kong Today' in Liberal Studies for local schools, the project also analyses the various experiences for knowing the techniques of interaction and communication in curatorial and visitor practices. Just as our daily life is re-presented here for critical performance and analysis (rather than auratic admiration), the curatorial project moves away from skepticism and alienation to approach a cultural production of hope. For the minus project, power is everywhere made visible, so that performing everyday life on the daily level becomes the very field for critical engagement.

3 – Alexandra Chang

Global Art Flows: A Translocal Positionality

My paper looks at post-1990s Asian and Asian diasporic art, exploring transcultural flows of artistic production and artists. In the developing discourse of the field, with new global realities of artists living and working in a space of transculturality, diaspora has come to be less affiliated with, as [James] Clifford writes, "roots in a specific place and desire for return as around an ability to recreate a culture in diverse locations," and instead of being characterized by a teleology of "return," "these histories of displacement fall into a category of quasi diasporas, showing only some diasporic feature or moments.

I will investigate international artists and artistic production as they relate to theories of globalism. Examples will

be drawn from a range of post-90s artists and collectives including Tomokazu Matsuyama, Godzilla, The New Grand Tour, and Tomato Grey. The paper explores ideas of diaspora, transculturality, hybridity, localism, and cosmopolitanism. I will look at how the notion of “intervisual-ity” inherent in the art of these diasporic artists, who live and work in urban centers enmeshed in a cosmopolitan intermix of cultural signifiers, empowers agency within their works.

4 – Manuel Cirauqui

Reversion of the Local: Translation & Transmission

This presentation will confront transculturalism with the idea of the local, assessing some symptomatic facts in the realms of contemporary art & literature and their ‘geocultural’ meaning. The convergence of two angles—translation and transmission—will thus be articulated regarding the circulation of different forms of writing and performance.

The first module of the presentation will take on some famous and infamous cases of translation in the late XXth century, from Jorge Luis Borges’ essay on ‘The translators of the Arabian Nights’ to dubbing practices in crepuscular underground Kung-Fu cinema.

The second module will address the topic of transmission through free radio broadcasting theory, and more specifically through Tetsuo Kogawa’s notions of ‘narrowcasting’ and the ‘translocal’. This confrontation will hopefully open a debate on the following questions: How is transculturalism reverted on the local sphere, and vice versa? How does this articulation work as a ‘mode of subjectivation’?

5 – Damien Roach

Deep Pan-Global: Pizza, Multitudinous Influence, Mutation, and Trans-cultural Exchange

In my contribution to the seminar, I will begin by looking at ideas that travel well. To clarify, let’s say those that are somehow able to cross geographic, or rather, cultural borders with ease, flowing lossless like viruses. These kinds of ideas that enter freely and unbroken into the blood flow of a cultural economy are the focus—moving from place to place in wild and promiscuous oscillations. As a platform for this train of thought, I ask why is it that the ancient and enduring dish, pizza, for example, is able to take on multitudinous influence from local cuisine internationally, and yet still remain very much itself—never becoming transformed into another, new culinary entity altogether? What are some of the characteristics that make this ease of flexibility or accent-shifting possible? Is there anything here that can be applied to or will be useful in the development of thinking we are working towards in relation to artistic and curatorial practice? Furthermore, if we are to think of the trans-cultural exchange as a kind of series of slight mutations or adaptations from some foundational DNA or DNAs, what then is the difference in considering these movements as generative, ‘productive’ and diversifying operations, or as fueled by an entropic, ‘destructive’ homogenizing drive?

6 – Barthélémy Togo

Bandjoun Station: Culture and Creativity as Vectors of Development

Aware of the double dilemma of being on the one hand unable to protect Africa’s classical and contemporary artistic heritage, and yet keen to undertake an ambitious cultural project, I decided to use most of the money I have earned through my work as an artist to set up “Bandjoun Station”, a non-profit-making project of entirely personal inspiration in terms of concept, construction, production and implementation.

We Africans do not have the ‘luxury’ of surrender, of whining and waiting, in spite of the enormous number of obstacles encountered by Africa and her diaspora. It is essential that we find OUR OWN solutions in all areas, whether agriculture, healthcare, economy, culture, politics, education or sport. In order to do that our African countries must set up a large number of vibrant and innovative structures in order to stimulate creativity and the desire for culture, as well as to develop the practical side and bring projects to fruition.

Bandjoun Station is situated on the high plateau of Western Cameroon, 3 km from the town of Bafoussam, 300 km from Douala and Yaoundé. Bandjoun Station is first and foremost a creative workshop where I wish to gather fellow artists. Accommodation in Bandjoun Station House will be possible for some of them who will create/produce on the premises and participate in the in situ creation of exceptional works and monumental pieces that require a lot of space for their realization.

All our guests will be able to work on their own projects, appropriate to the human and natural context of the site, and to propose activities and events, whether in the local region, further afield in Cameroon, or abroad.

Participants

Bani Abidi, Alexandra Chang, Stephen Ching-Kiu Chan, Manuel Cirauqui, Damien Roach, Barthelemy Togo



