

Part 4.1: Influence of the Printed Word

Visible Interview

Kunsthaus Graz

Universalmuseum
Joanneum

Content

Part 4.1

- 4 Matteo Lucchetti and Judith Wielander
On the Influence of the Printed Word in Socially Engaged Artistic Practices
A foreword

- 8 Visible
'Free for All'. Conditions May Apply
An interview with Temporary Services on publishing as an artistic practice

On the Influence of the Printed Word in Socially Engaged Artistic Practices

A foreword by

Matteo Lucchetti and Judith Wielander

About the Visible Project

Visible is, broadly speaking, a research project in contemporary art, where art is understood in its capability to make people look at things with a different perspective; a repository of knowledge, in its making, for all those artistic practices that are able to lead art becoming part of something else, leaving behind its own codified field and regime of speech, and allowing it to create new meaningful readings and visions about our contemporaneity and our future times.

When we thought about a framework or a platform that could allow us to host, within this understanding, different voices, subjects and contexts, we thought that an exhibition wasn't the most compelling answer to such a demanding aim. In order to fulfill our expectations, in terms of scale and diversity of propositions, we would have had to dispose of an outstanding budget and workforce, while we were just beginning to make public a one year long research. We saw then in publishing, the potentiality to respect the multiplicity of locales we were giving voice to, the flexibility of a virtual space where different needs were able to find the best form of expression, and finally a good stage to let an open-ended confrontation take place in a variety of ways. That's how our Visible publication saw the light in 2010, by inviting nine emerging curators operating in likewise emerging areas of the

world, to select five practices (run by individual artists or collectives) to create a reconnaissance of forty-one artistic positions involved in building or rebuilding the imagination of the present through interdisciplinary ideas about art and its role in the social sphere. Subsequently the project evolved into a production award that could research, support and offer a discursive and productive platform to innovative artistic projects that are able to become visible also in fields other than the artistic ones. Art works that are actively engaging within the social sphere, understanding art as a tool to make visible other fields and issues within the traditional art system and thus sharing an awareness about artistic production as an active element and agency in contemporary society, with critical and future oriented aspirations.

The Workbook Series

On the occasion of the exhibition *Cittadellarte – Sharing Transformation* we were invited to translate the Visible project into several propositions that could contribute to the show and to the several functions embedded in the cittadella conceived by Construct Lab as exhibition display. Therefore we involved our network of artists and curators in creating with us a library, made of those titles that influenced their understanding of their artistic practice in its interdisciplinary crossings, and a small cinema, with a screening program of video works illustrating the diversity of approaches represented in the visible platform.

Parallel to that, we have committed to the production of a further step in the sphere of publishing, by assembling a free, digital, flexible book series that could allow us to continue presenting the emerging researches, that we gather around the Visible network, by shedding new lights on them. The main idea we wanted to experiment with, was the one of having workbooks where the main exercise we 'assign' to the artists and curators on our board, is to try to present a dialogue with an expert coming from a another field of knowledge, may this be

urbanism, economy, cooking or whatsoever other sector of human expertise. In doing so, we're trying to open up modest and unprecedented confrontation spaces where new bestowals of what art can affect and transform, within the social body, are achieved and written black on white on this free space that publishing can be.

Here the use of the printed matter gains the meaning of a working space, where two diverse outlooks on our contemporaneity and its issues, can find a common ground in which to attempt to mold a new imagery around specific areas of the social fabric. The discourse of art is therefore spinning around new spheres of influence, letting the printed word affect new audiences, possibly broader, when the contribution of art to other disciplines creates new intertwined understandings of the role of art.

To kick off the first titles of the series we have invited the collective Temporary Services (Brett Bloom, Salem Collo-Julín and Marc Fischer), to answer to an interview in which we go through their personal history; that they very much based around the idea that publishing can be one of the most accessible and democratic tools to spread empowering artistic projects and their outcomes. Starting in 1998 with the opening of an experimental exhibition space in Chicago, in a working class neighborhood, the collective has been operating on an international scale for a long time now, and maintaining publishing at the core of their activities to 'provide art as a service to others; a way to pay attention to the social context in which art is produced and received'.

Following this conversation with Temporary Services we present here two consistent excerpts from two of the first Visible workbooks. The first one is titled *Art as a Place* and sees the Indian art group Raqs Media Collective in dialogue with Kaushik Bhowmik, a historian that shares with them some thoughts about imagining art as a place. Thanks to the exhibition *sarai Reader 09*, curated by the collective, this conversation became public and involved almost 60 artists, and non artists, that submitted

a proposal through an open call. A proposal to think about what constitutes the artistic practice, to think to art as a place that becomes a different place every time. As Bhowmik reminds us 'the contradiction between unprecedented material creativity amongst populations and the regime of productivity that feeds off it are beginning to reach epic proportions'. Preoccupied on how to give new meanings to the place that art can inhabit and make meaningful to the other fields of life, the Raqs Media Collective share through this workbook the process of an exhibition full of encounters, events, talks, writing, situations, objects, materials, and all the conversations that filled the gaps in between these actions. The other excerpt comes instead from 'Reality can suck my dick, darling. The museo travesti del Perú and the histories we deserve'. An intense text by Miguel A. Lopez about Giuseppe Campuzano, 'the Peruvian philosopher and drag queen that created the ephemeral project called Museo Travesti del Perú (Transvestite Museum of Peru). This museum, founded in 2004, is an attempt at a queer counter-reading and a promiscuous intersectional thinking of history, which collects objects, images, texts and documents, press clippings, and appropriated artworks, to propose actions, stagings and publications that fracture the dominant models of production of bodies. The project, halfway between performance and historical research, proposes a critical reviewing of the so-called »history of Peru« from the strategic perspective of a fictional figure he calls the »androgynous indigenous / mixed-race transvestite«'.

With new plans to expand the reach of the platform with all its participants towards new segments of society, we believe the workbook series has all the potential to bring the discourse of art back to those debates and topics where it can play a big change in the growing awareness for social transformation through culture.

‘Free for All’ Conditions May Apply

An interview with Temporary Services on publishing as an artistic practice

Visible

Library

Hi Marc, thank you for accepting this invitation to have a conversation with us about Temporary Services’ artistic practice and the topic of publishing in and beyond contemporary art and its discourse. We’d like to kick this off by asking you which three books, at least, could not be missing from your nightstand, when looking back to the texts that have inspired the 14 years of Temporary Services’ activity.

Replies to the questions by **Brett Bloom** and **Marc Fischer** of Temporary Services:

Endcommercial – Reading the City, Florian Böhm et al, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2002

Contemporary Pictaquesque, Nils Norman, Book Works, London, 2002

RE/Search (several titles)—hard to choose which of these was most important to us. Some would include *Zines Volumes I and II*, *Pranks!* and *Pranks 2*; *Incredibly Strange Music Volumes I and II*; *The Industrial Culture Handbook*, and other titles. Most importantly it was the weird way in which they combined seemingly disparate things together and how they championed incredibly obscure things and practices at a

time well before Google searches and easy access to information—when counter cultures were still a thing you had to show up for rather than consume as information online. All of these books have great interviews and bibliographies—they are useful for suggesting other people and books to look out for.

Field

In relation to the *Library Art Project*, realised in 2001, where you donated 100 books made by artists that move through different disciplines to the Harold Washington Library, you say ‘a library—a place that attempts to contain the world of knowledge under one roof—can clearly provide the most suitable home to such an eclectic array of materials. Most of these artists books have more in common with other books already in the library than they do with each other’. We find already in this moment of your practice a clear vision of how boundaries can be broken down or shifted between art practice and other fields of knowledge. Can you point out key works of yours where this dynamic has evolved, accelerated, or failed in this ongoing strive to make art ‘visible as part of something else’?

A initiative of ours that predates the *Library Project* was *Free For All* where we distributed over 10,000 free items. We described *Free For All* like this: ‘Over 50 artists, individuals and organizations have been asked to contribute work to be distributed for free at this one-day-only event. Artists’ work will be integrated with a wide range of material submerging the work in a broader context than it normally enjoys. Religious tracts, booklets, flyers, stickers, matchbooks, posters, audio tapes, and postcards are among the items given away. It is a continuing goal of Temporary Services to seek new ways of presenting work and increasing the audience for it. For this reason, we have chosen to present this project at a more open and public location.’

The people who came out for *Free For All* were primarily our peers, and an art audience with very

few coming in off the street. We had hoped for more people to wander in, but the weather was terrible and the storefront was not the most inviting in that its windows had been walled up long ago. We provided screen printed boxes for visitors to take so they could fill them with their own ‘curated’ mobile version of *Free For All*. We provided several booklets, one of which was about *Free For All* and gave suggestions for how people could re-present the items in unusual situations. We were really interested in how art could be put in relation to other things in the world and how it could circulate once the normal frames of making meaning of art were removed.

We were frustrated by the limited audience for *Free For All* and this had an impact on the *Library Project*. We spent a lot of time thinking about how to utilize pre-existing infrastructure that is ostensibly public, like a library that has an enormous amount of resources already built in, to reach different audiences. When we started out, most of our work for the first few years happened in Chicago. We began archiving our work on our website and in cheaply made publications early on. This greatly helped our ideas find an audience even when things weren’t well attended, or weren’t written about critically—particularly in the case of events that were not always given to being covered in the usual ways that art exhibitions might be reviewed. Our hope is always that art and our ideas can be considered alongside all other disciplines. In some ways internet searches—and the ability to find things based on their content and ideas rather than what kind of person made them—help this kind of coexistence happen more easily than something like an exhibition or an art event.

Audience

Again from the Library Art project’s booklet: ‘I believe that artists should have a voice in how their work is presented. If their book is going into a library, they should be able to decide which section will provide the strongest experience

of their work, and which audience should be favored for access.’ Retrospectively speaking, has Temporary Services always managed to facilitate access to the audiences they wanted, and if so how have you managed to do so? Has publishing become a preferential tool to facilitate access?

We try to be open to the unexpected and the audiences for some projects have definitely not always been what we anticipated. Some projects, such as Prisoners’ Inventions when it was first shown at MASS MoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts were seen by well over 100,000 people over the course of a full year and we are continually surprised when we meet new people who tell us about their experience of that installation.

More recently, in the Spring of 2012, we produced a public concert series featuring seven Danish bands titled Music Mountain as part of the exhibition Visit Tingbjerg which took place in the town Tingbjerg, about fifteen minutes by bus from the center of Copenhagen. Because of the stigma many people have about Tingbjerg as a boring immigrant community with a lot of crime, few people from Copenhagen make the effort to visit. None of the bands we invited had ever performed in Tingbjerg and most of the band members had never visited the area.

With the exception of one concert that was moved indoors due to rain, all of the shows were outside in two different shopping center parking lots. For ourselves and for the bands, the typical experience of live music has been inside dark clubs, late at night, and sometimes with an age restriction. People show up to concert venues to hear music that they expect to hear and have a pretty good idea what they are going to get. With Music Mountain, the bands were thrilled to get to perform outside, in daylight, before an audience that often included young children, elderly residents, people waiting for a bus fifty yards away, people on their way to the Aldi and Kiosk stores, or people who just watched out their windows for a few minutes and wondered what was

going on and why. One member of the duo Yoke and Yohe, whose performance was particularly sparsely attended, really took everything in stride and valued the experience greatly. He remarked that if the concert was only something that someone in a neighboring apartment building heard for 30 minutes through the vent in their bathroom window and they could never place the source of their music, that was okay with him and perfectly valid.

Our own fairly conservative and orthodox notions of how one should experience live music were greatly challenged and upended by this project. The performances were not just conventional concerts, but markers of what could happen in public space, and an experiment in providing unexpected experiences in culturally neglected communities using live music. It was also a great collaboration because the bands were open to something different and took their performances so seriously despite the very strange civic placements that we put them in.

One of the great things about publications is that you don't have to show up for something to experience them in a vital way and many publications that we originally made for various exhibits and events have been seen after the fact by many thousands of people that never saw the projects they were originally published for. Our increasing awareness of the power of publications to connect with people as autonomous things, apart from functioning as exhibition guides, has led us to produce more booklets, newspapers and books that don't require an exhibition to justify their reason for being. At this point probably at least 100,000 copies of nearly 100 different publications have been printed and circulated by Temporary Services. Publishing has become our most constant creative form and we are continually surprised and pleased by the range of people that our books and booklets reach—though we are never content with distribution and are always looking for and open to new ways of using books to bring ideas to new audiences.

Publishing has been a way for our work to enter into public life in many countries and communities around the world. It has allowed us to bypass the commercial gallery and museum system and its gatekeepers who control access to what gets celebrated and talked about. We have found our publications are perfect vehicles for insisting on other narratives and subject matter that the dominant conversations neglect or show no interest in. The 'alternative' we were looking to make with our exhibition spaces in Chicago was in our publishing all along. It took us some time to realize how significant it could be.

Audience as producer

Whenever any participatory approach to artistic practice appears on sight, a series of dichotomies over the authorship of the artist and its related issues rise. 'Active versus passive viewer, egoistical versus collaborative artist, privileged versus needy community, aesthetic complexity versus simple expression, cold autonomy versus convivial community' sums up Claire Bishop in her recent book *Artificial Hells*. In the constant act of reconciliation of your position as artists into a 'res publica', how has your focus on sharing your artistic practice with other artists, activists, communities, spontaneous participants and so on, survived the many 'artificial' hells you went through?

We don't accept this idea of 'artificial hells.' We think it is based on spurious and deceptive reasoning and is an ideological project of someone deeply threatened by shifting trends. We don't have the need to validate the already powerful, already entrenched artistic ideologies, the hegemony of the market that seems to be the unconscious of Bishop's efforts. We put our work into many different places and relationships and don't privilege the art world Bishop champions and tries so bitterly to defend. We want to see the boundaries she cares about dissolve and on political, social, aesthetic, emotional and other levels. Bishop's accounts are always a caricature of the complexity of impulses in new ways of working.

These new methodologies are at times clumsy, and other times elegant, but they are seeking ways out of the very landed power structures she celebrates and has entrenched herself in. She routinely picks the worst examples of new forms of art and holds them up as proof that anyone concerned with similar things is equally wrong. Many let her get away with flattening the work of large numbers of artists by very dubious straw man arguments. There is also an asymmetry of power in the work she supports (those already consecrated by the market and the dominant discourse that have access, galleries, collectors, and the wealthy behind them, and endless robotic curators putting their output into exhibitions) and those struggling for other narratives. Clearly there is a massive shift in artistic practice away from what Bishop cares about. The more successful it is the more violent her rhetoric gets, as evidenced by this book's title. The one thing she either does not understand or cannot even see is that people often use rhetoric to distinguish their work from market-driven aesthetics. A big part of this is making community and cohering others around shared values and a sense of social belonging. This work and culture is still in the vast minority and it seems at times she blames it for that too.

We have always sought to create as open, clear, and inclusive initiatives as possible. How they function depends on the specific thing we are talking about. Our efforts have been empowering for us and for others and don't need the validation of someone like Bishop to provide meaning for us and a large number of people. Some things have worked and others have not. The ways in which aesthetic efforts are received is incredibly complex if you don't want to impose a centralized position, or way of experiencing things, which Bishop always does. Hers is a very modernist, authoritarian voice, much like Greenberg, that tries to centralize, essentialize, and control how we are to think about the things we see and feel. It tries to dismiss legitimate dissent and outrage at how the

1% controls access to art, money, fame, etc. and excludes the enormous 'dark matter' of the rest of us. We have not experienced nor created 'artificial hells.' Our work has been really satisfying to us and an ever growing number of supporters both those who care about art discourse and those who do not. We openly speak out about the abusive power structures we encounter in the art world, sometimes with our work, but mainly just when we speak publicly. We try to insist on ways of working that bring others, with less privilege but who are making really compelling work, into the opportunities we have enjoyed. Our efforts are to continue to push for art to ever expand its audiences, its creative potentials unhindered by market compliance and fealty, and to continue to remove boundaries that are concrete. There is a ton of work that is interesting and compelling made by people who do not have the social skills or narcissistic desire to be famous, that should be celebrated and their work exposed to larger audiences. We can use our access to bring their work to larger audiences. Human creativity is also present in all aspects of human activity. It is really interesting to us to see when work in other areas is way more compelling than that of artists. We have met a lot of really interesting people who would never come to an art event let alone wander into a high end gallery, but because we removed the social and visible barriers, they came. This has led to fruitful collaborations and conversations that have benefited us greatly and those who have seen our work.

Services

Brett Bloom, Salem Collo-Julín and you started an experimental exhibition space in 1998, in a working class neighborhood in Chicago. The name of your collective reflects the desire to provide art not as a sell-able object, but as a temporary service to others, as a 'chance to put a lot of fresh information out into the world'. You didn't want to be recognized as an art space, rather you preferred to blend in with the many shops and agencies on your street.

You invented a temporary infrastructure to experiment with a new language and methodology around art and production of knowledge shared with different temporary communities. Considering the crisis of the exhibition format that Museums are going through, do you see many other artistic positions, that are, like Temporary Services, developing new formats for their practice?

It was important that the storefront was not immediately recognized as an art space. We did not want to have the typical gentrifying effect that these kinds of spaces trigger. For many in the neighborhood, its function was more ambiguous, or seemed to shift depending on what was happening inside, in the window, or on the sidewalk in front. It created a productive confusion that opened up many conversations with people that would never stop by if it were just an art space. We didn't actively discourage people from thinking it was an art space once they were there. Like all of our work, some people will need to see it as art and can't look at it in broader terms, while others will not need this framing mechanism at all. Social experience cannot be reduced to a single perspective or narrative. This is an understanding that is deeply lacking in art circles and in art criticism in a profound way.

There seems to be an ever growing number of artists and art groups that are putting their work in directions that are opening up new and powerful channels for artistic practice in the world. What is exciting about a lot of it is that it does not now need to be validated by its appearance in the art world at all (it has seemed in the past that many people would legitimize their work 'outside' by distilling it 'inside')—it has a power and momentum and ethical gravity that makes it incredibly compelling.

We are excited by the work that Laurie Jo Reynolds and her cohorts in the group Tamms Year Ten, who we sometimes assist and work with, have been doing around the drive to close down Tamms Correctional Facility in downstate Illinois over a long history of

extreme human rights abuses. Laurie Jo has deemed what she does: 'Legislative Art' and the drive to effect social change has pushed her work into some very unexpected places and audiences—everyone from the Governor of Illinois to the families of men that have been enduring the conditions at Tamms, as well as the men themselves, some of whom have been released and gone on to collaborate with Tamms Year Ten. Work like this can benefit from being included in exhibitions but those shows aren't really where most of the work happens and finds its audience. The art of Tamms Year Ten is perhaps sited on bus trips to the state capital, to the prison itself, or in letters sent to the men that are incarcerated. We worked with Tamms Year Ten and another artist, Sarah Ross, to create a project called Supermax Subscriptions. With this, we organize people who have airline miles that are about to expire and encourage them to convert those miles into magazine and newspaper subscriptions that can be sent to the men at Tamms - both to keep them engaged with the outside world, to rally outside support for their condition, and as a demonstration to the prison and its employees that people on the outside are monitoring this population and trying to engage with them despite their conditions which prevent the prisoners from having any human contact during their incarceration at Tamms. The Trampoline House in Copenhagen is an incredible fusion of art, activism, and advocacy. It is a user-driven culture center for asylum seekers in Denmark (the strictest and most racist place in the EU to get asylum) and their Danish and international allies. It was started by artists and curators in a student gallery at the Royal Art Academy. The organizers quickly realized the ethical implications of working in this way and organized a long term space that could provide the needs for a population that was being made invisible in Danish society. Someone looking for a traditional art experience (or even a 'social practice' experience) will be frustrated by this place. Someone with an open mind and a visionary

understanding of art will see tremendous potentials, courage, and a deadly serious fusion of art and life that most artists will NEVER achieve.

The Swedish/Dutch art group Kultivator is working with art and agriculture on a small island off the west coast of southern Sweden. They are working and living with sustainable and resilient design for their art and buildings, food security, a fully functioning time-banking economy, the imagination that comes from the forest, and have a general practice that pushes beyond what most artists are doing with art and ecology and pretenses of radicality in their work.

Printed city – Visible award

For the Visible Award 2011, Temporary Services proposed to conceive a new publicly accessible publishing facility and experimental cultural center in Philadelphia. The facility would give you the opportunity to collaborate with Philadelphia residents to realise a series of new publications on site. Printed City would give Temporary Services a place for their own practice to thrive, but you also hoped to continue cultivating and developing more democratic audiences for contemporary artistic initiatives with the project. If in 2001, with the Library Project, you wanted to blend your publishing activity within an existing library context, in this proposal you alternatively look to establish an open autonomous space for publishing. Is this reflecting an awareness about the spaces where publishing today can exist and spread, and perhaps sometimes fund its own new premises in the ever changing cityscape?

The stories we tell about ourselves, our communities and our cities have an important role in defining them. Printed City would be a way to directly mobilize the power of the stories a community already holds. The project amplifies and celebrate these stories—putting the tools of publishing and bookmaking directly into the hands of those in a city. Printed material still has this awesome capacity to mobilize people, reach out and connect with folks, that needs

a great deal more exploration. It would have been an ideal situation for us to have a base to work from and explore our ideas in ways we have not yet been able to. We need books and stories now more than ever to help prepare us for the tremendous changes we are going to have to endure as global warming continues and things mutate rapidly around us. Cities will have to change as will people. Books and organizing new forms of social experience are more important than ever.

One of the advantages we find in our group is having a group writing, editing and design process. Working with other people to make something like a publication often results in a tighter, more clearly written and more carefully designed thing than just one person working in isolation without any sort of feedback loop. All writers need editors. The work isn't always executed with a perfectly balanced and equal division of labor, but the input of others always makes for stronger publications in our experience.

Publishing

Let's play the game of science fiction as an ending note. You started your activity in 1998 by experimenting with publishing as an artistic activity. What would the Temporary Services of 2098 start experimenting with? Namely, how do you see publishing as an art form at that moment in time?

People are no longer using fossil fuels, populations have contracted violently because no one was prepared for climate change's devastating havoc. Art has become vital and a part of articulating daily life and is no longer a function of capitalist power struggles. The glorious book has turned into a beautiful, cherished, special object again that is magical, powerful, and carries significance that resonates deeply with people. The shamanic promise of the book once again opens up new avenues of being. The oral traditions that fueled human storytelling and world building for most of the tens of thousands of years of our

species' existence would once more clearly vibrate deeply in an existential manner and the arts would be restored to their importance in human meaning making above superfluous distractions. Art would have to really be back to what it was tens of thousands of years ago, but with the scars of the consequences of our profound hubris and arrogance that was the industrial revolution and its brutal aftermath. We will never fully recover from the damage we have done and the resources we have used. It will not be possible to make things on the same scale ever again. We did that much harm.