

Sparwasser HQ presents:
“Curating Degree Zero Archive”
A Series of Evening Talks and Performed Recommendations

Written Summaries by Joel Mu

Introductory remarks

In conjunction with the Curating Degree Zero Archive (CDZA) exhibition at Sparwasser HQ, invited guests ‘performed’ the Archive through a series of evening talks in order to provide visitors with navigating recommendations for the CDZA. From these performances, Sparwasser’s own re-interpretation of the CDZA was made possible while simultaneously making the material and knowledge held within the CDZA accessible. This verbal strategy taking the form of evening talks was made possible by the generous contribution of invited artists, curators, cultural producers, art historians and those who move in-between these practices. Approached from different critical positions, the resulting discussions included both positive appraisals as well as critical engagements, that at times questioned the entire CDZA project.

Responding to the CDZA’s previous installations, Sparwasser organizers Lise Nellemann, Joel Mu and Pernille Böttcher re-interpreted the CDZA around a network-based navigation system. Originating from the following performed recommendations, this method of navigating the archive relied on a system of face-to-face communication, socializing and anecdotal referrals to visitors who missed the evening talks. The priority given to the function of public talks and social forum follows Sparwasser’s existing exhibition practice, where art projects and invited exhibitions are continually discussed and critiqued by Sparwasser’s extended network and participating public.

Recognizing the problems associated with transcription and lack of time, these summaries are presented as suggestive snippets of the CDZA public talks program held at Sparwasser HQ.

Please note: not all of Sparwasser’s invited performers/guest speakers are themselves represented in the CDZA; some are instead drawn from Sparwasser’s own network.

Kent Hansen is an artist and art organizer
Performed on September 9, 2006

By first presenting his own work, the artist found other works in the CDZA that fitted with his own practice. Describing himself as both an artist and art organizer, Hansen describes his work as being about the relationship between the public sphere and large corporations. Most recently, Hansen's artistic practice has involved participatory-based projects that work together with corporate companies. Seen as joint-projects between art and corporate organizations, Hansen's practice sets out to place artistic interjection within the corporate environments that both house and 'support' his art projects. Hansen's *Demokratisk Innovation* (2000) for instance, attempts to express, from the inside-out, the working structure of a given corporation. Working in collaboration with the participating corporation, this project critiques how a corporation identifies and brands itself, as well as the mechanism used to produce corporate power. This strategy of working from the inside-out, which is described as a kind of internal reformism, seeks to create an external openness by internal resistance. The artist, who resists the conventions of corporate work, thereby causes the organizations to publicly critique themselves from these artistic interjections. Hansen's work sets out to create a discourse around art and corporation culture that upon critical engagement is intended to produce corporate change.

Tonight's CDZA recommendations:

Graffiti Slogans, by Drabble and Sachs

TM Guerilla, by Drabble and Sachs

Ulrike Kremeier is an art historian and artistic director of Platform in Berlin

Bettina Steinbruegge is artistic director of Halle für Kunst Lüneburg

Florian Wuest is an artist and curator specializing in film and video

Performed on September 11, 2006

Performed as a conversation between the invited participants, the problematic of archiving was discussed. Framed around specific questions, they ask: “what is the difference between an archive and a collection of material; what kind of archives are there; how does an archive function; what is the implication of their existence; and what is the public’s relation to them?” In this regard, CDZA was critiqued and the question of knowledge production and reception came to dominate the night’s discussion. Differences in opinion, however, did query the preferred approach to archiving. Scientific vs. artistic models of archiving were compared, concluding that the CDZA’s archiving model sat in-between these two approaches. For Steinbruegge and Wuest, the scientific approach of Reinigungsgesellschaft – former Halle Für Kunst in Lüneburg CDZA interpreters – was regarded as an effective approach to knowledge production and navigation. Specifically, both Steinbruegge and Wuest, preferred the Reinigungsgesellschaft’s CDZA display because the exhibition used ‘Keywords’; ‘Themes’; and subject-matter based bookmarks to order the CDZA material. Kremeier, who generally supported Reinigungsgesellschaft’s approach, questioned the denial of other – more artistic – archiving approaches. For Kremeier, artist’s archives, like personal archives for instance, were interesting because they suggested less academic approaches to collecting and sorting material, and ordering and presenting of knowledge.

A significant criticism of Sparwasser’s own CDZA display was its reliance on curator names for the ordering of artistic material. For all three participants, this approached privileged art world audiences, who possessed a previous knowledge of curators and curated projects. Furthermore, the absence of artists names from the CDZA’s webpage references was also criticized, as it appeared to elevate curators over artists. With these points considered, all three participants suggested that CDZA’s archiving position needed to be clarified, with its critical themes specifically stated and selection criteria made more transparent.

Tonight’s CDZA recommendations:

Wuest: *Side Cinema*, by Ele Carpenter

Steinbruegge: Casco, Utrecht and von Bismarck

Barnaby Drabble is co-founder of Curating Degree Zero Archive

Lise Nellesmann is the director of Sparwasser HQ in Berlin

Beatrice von Bismarck is an art historian, director of Kunstraum der Universität Lueneburg

Performed on September 13, 2006

Opening with a brief history of the Archive's inception, Drabble explained the premise of the 1998 CDZA symposium in Bremen. Since Bremen, Drabble described how the CDZA symposium was re-interpreted as an archive, and then further re-interpreted into different touring exhibitions. Questions and critiques emerging in response to the archive's exhibitions included: definitional queries (what is an archive, what is curating, what is critical and what is experimental?); questions of power between curators and artists; critiques about presentation and display; issues regarding (curator) self-promotion and marketing; questions regarding differences and similarities between archives and exhibitions; and issues relating to the archives current touring schedule vs. establishing a permanent location. The subject of navigation placed the general practice of archiving against the spatial experimentation undertaken by the CDZA's previous exhibitions in Europe. Seen from its interdisciplinary approach, Drabble asked: "Is an art exhibition necessarily about art?"

Following Drabble, von Bismarck asked: how is criticality in Art addressed? Referring to various projects represented in the CDZA von Bismarck suggested that one aspect of criticality must always address the question of audiences. Teasing out the idea of "organizing the public" or "audiences organized critically", different positions of critical curating were unpacked for their audience engaging devices. Seen from these different perspectives, audiences were given not as immediate certainties, but rather as unpredictable contexts that needed to be considered and folded into art.

Talking about Sparwasser's re-interpretation of the CDZA, Nellesmann discussed the importance of hosting and inviting, and viewing the exhibiting space as a situation of project and research. Explaining the motivation behind Sparwasser's performance-based navigation, Nellesmann suggested that both speaker and audience participants were tools for socializing, and for the fulfillment of curator/artist (critical) evaluations.

Tonight's CDZA recommendations:

Ulrike Solbrig is an artist and independent curator

Astrid Mania is an independent curator, art historian and critic

Performed on September 17, 2006

Mania's contribution to the Sparwasser talks focused on the materiality of the CDZA's exhibition, namely its catalogues. From this perspective, Mania drew on material that strayed away from the conventional, opting instead for creative catalogue models. These examples circled around Mania's critique that most exhibition catalogues failed to represent the distinctive qualities of art shows and artist works. Mania pointed out that the standard catalogue started with a director's/curator's statement, followed by an artist statement, reproductions and artist CV. Dissatisfied with these catalogue conventions, Mania stressed the important role publications had in bringing past exhibitions into the present. Suggesting alternative models, Mania presented artists books and catalogues from the CDZA that played with their image documentation, written content, published format and finished fabrication. In some cases, curators statements were placed at the end or highly stylized graphics were used to de-prioritize explanatory texts. Other catalogues demonstrated how printed hierarchy could be affected by missing page numbers or spiral binding, eliminating any sense of a beginning or end. Even the presumption of an actual book was shown to be only one method of many catalogue options.

Drawing on her experience as a member of the Berlin-based artist-group, *Unwetter*, Solbrig introduced the notion of "uncurating" as produced by the groups "Discursive Picnics". Regarded as the opposite of curating, Solbrig described Unwetter's uncurated strategy as an open and inclusive meeting of artist types, who wish to present work or material of general interest; start critical discussion or propose future artistic actions. For Unwetter, this function of socializing – usually around food at a picnic – is central to the groups work. Similar to CDZA's own archiving interest, the collection of material is also carried out by Unwetter's participants. However, unlike the CDZA, Unwetter's approach does not employ a system of judgement, selection, inclusion and exclusion. For Unwetter, the archiving of material is open to anyone who participates in Unwetter's events. .

Tonight's CDZA recommendations:

Mania: *Strategies of Desire*, by Sabine Schaschl-Cooper

Mania: *Vito Acconci, Photoworks, videos et films 1969-1972*, by Cathrine Queloz

Mania: *A book of pages*, by The INTERNATIONAL 3

Solbrig: *Tele Visions - Kunst sieht fern*, by Joshua Decter

Solbrig: *Duerfen die das? Kunst als sozialer Raum*, by Stella Rollig

Henriette Bretton Meier is an independent curator
Dominic Hislop is an artist
Performed on September 21, 2006

Looking “beyond the white cube”, Bretton Meier’s curatorial practice seeks to directly engage with the viewing public. Meeting them in different contexts, her interests include art in the public space. Asking how the public is greeted, Bretton Meier posed the same question regarding how the public is met in the CDZA. Drawing on her own experience in the Archive, Bretton Meier discussed her encounter as something personal, like being in book-shop; the archive is greeted when something catches your eye, while other material falls to the background, remaining unfamiliar. In keeping with the ‘personal’, Bretton Meier referred to Jacob Fabricius’s “Old News”, “Sandwiched (in New York)” and “Rent-A-Bench” as something in the archive that caught her eye. Working outside conventional gallery formats, Fabricius’s work elaborates this notion of art in the public space; art produced in new formats; and the shifting role of artist-curator.

Sharing the same interests as CDZA participant and artist Gregory Sholette, Hislop discussed the merged roles of artist-curator-activist. Referring to Sholette’s various collaborative projects, such as “PADD”, “REPO History” and “The Lower Manhattan Sign Project”, Hislop discussed the political aesthetic of providing a voice to another group, who are usually marginalized and not artists themselves. Describing his own artistic strategy of circulation in the public sphere, Hislop referred to his own “Big Hope” projects, where his work explores notions of urban mapping, unrecorded and random histories and the dominance/subversion of market aesthetics.

Tonight’s CDZA recommendations:

Bretton Meier: *Sandwiched (in New York)*, by Jacob Fabricius

Bretton Meier: *Old News*, by Jacob Fabricius

Bretton Meier: *Rent-a-bench*, by Jacob Fabricius

Hislop: *Red River, Take Two*, by Gregory Sholette

Hislop: *REPOhistory -P: A.D.D.*, by Gregory Sholette

Madeleine Park is an artist and former organizer of the artist-run space GUN, Norway

Angelica Richter curator and director of the Werkleitz Biennale in Halle

Martin Conrads co-curator of Werkleitz Biennale 2004

Performed on September 23, 2006

Having worked in an artist-run gallery in Norway, Park described her involvement in GUN (Gallery without a Name). Directed towards international collaboration, GUN developed the now defunct Bed Projects, which were designed to enable international exchanges, particularly with artists and artist-run spaces from 'poorer' countries. Responding to the infrastructural demands of exchange housing and living, GUN developed and exported ready made bunk units, which could be installed by galleries to house visiting artists. These donated beds were also an effective way to build on existing networks and to develop new links.

Following Madeleine's discussion on artist-run spaces, Richter and Conrads offered an alternative system of exhibiting and 'curating', as presented in their work in the Werkleitz Biennale. Explaining how the Werkleitz Biennale is organized, the title of "cultural producer" was used as a counter-point to curators. For both Richter and Conrads, the term cultural producer, as apposed to curator, refers to a cross-disciplinary producer, who may work in mass-media, exhibitions, cultural events etc. Specifically, this method of exhibition-making sets out to seek other cultural representations – besides those presented in the visual arts – for the production of Werkleitz exhibitions. For example, in the Werkleitz Biennale, the development of public workshops and lectures are used to engage further with the Biennale's audience.

Tonight's CDZA recommendations:

Park: *CODE: RED*, by Tadej Pogacar/ P.A.R.A.S.T.E. Museum of Contemporary Art

Richter and Conrads: *3. Werkleitz Biennale SUB FICTION .Bd.1*, by Holger Kube Ventura

Richter and Conrads: *Programm 2002 (Werkleitz Biennale)*, by Holger Kube Ventura

Richter and Conrads: *2001 (Werkleitz Biennale)*, by Holger Kube Ventura

“Value” (Christoph Lang & Stephan Meylan) are artists
Sencer Vardarman is an artist
Performed on September 25, 2006

Lang and Meylan used their “Value” project as the focus of the talk, referring to it as an example of institutional critique. Presenting the projects history, Lang and Meylan stated that Value set out to show the bureaucratic processes of art institutions, describing how art is collected and passed onto the public. Designed as a dramaturgical act, Value re-presented institutional bureaucracy by employing actors as administrative archivists, for Value’s (mock) art depository. Taking on the function of a public archive, Value collected new works in temporary art space in Zurich. Open to the public, these collected works could be viewed, one at a time, in an adjacent reading/viewing room. This slow moving, bureaucratic machine was also partnered with Value’s art auction, which released patents to artists’ works and ideas at auction room prices.

Sharing a similar interest in archives, Vardarman presented a survey of CDZA material that he found “aesthetically” interesting. Drawing on his own archive project, Vardeman described how his archive is the result of gathered material from invited artists and contributing curators. Vardarman also described the role of curator as artist promoter.

Tonight’s CDZA recommendations:

Vardarman: *Interarchive*, by von Bismarck

Vardarman: *Atlas*, by Creischer & Siekmann

Vardarman: *Handbuch Antirassismus*, by Waldvogel & Babias

Vardarman: *Archiv*, by C. Keller

Vardarman: *I Fail to Agree*, by Hewitt + Jordan

Michael Baers is an artist
Eoghan McTigue is an artist
Maren Richter is an independent curator
Performed on September 27, 2006

Drawing on writings from Claire Doherty, McTigue talked about the loss of experience and the creation of distance by catalogue mediated 'art'. Referring specifically to context art or art in situation, McTigue questioned a catalogue's ability to properly convey the experience of these works. In catalogues, McTigue suggested, a work can be misrepresented or even changed, leaving the 'problem' or context of site specificity left unexplained, unengaged and unresolved. McTigue recognized the problem of documentation, particularly in the area of performance art, where the question of documenting performances continues as a topical debate in contemporary art. McTigue also acknowledged that while catalogues may change the experience of situation based art, they also enabled access to these kinds of practices, which would ordinarily be limited to geographically privileged audiences.

Using Pierre Bourdieu's writings on class, social economy and culture power as reference point, Baers critically responded to the authenticity of CDZA's own reconfiguration and recontextualising. Specifically, Baers argued that the CDZA's emphasis on architectural display and the presumption of changing models and open access was in reality a superficial tinkering at the archive's edges. Ultimately, the CDZA's structure is directed towards a privileged art-world audience, which relies to heavily on the maintenance of art-world (catalogue) norms. This particular critique came from Baers's own survey of archive material, which surveyed one entire shelf as a sample. For Baers, this improvised case-study pointed to the archives prejudices, which happened to highlight a disproportionate number of Swiss made publications. This discovery prompted Baers to ask: which network does the CDZA characterize; which curatorial/artistic practice does CDZA highlight; how does this map include some and exclude others; and how does the CDZA relate this collected material - the art and exhibitions - to the world at large?

N.B. Maren Richter was in attendance, but was too ill to present.

Tonight's CDZA recommendations:

McTigue: *From Studio to Situation*, by Claire Doherty

McTigue: *Situations: Contacts*, by Claire Doherty

Baers: *3 Vandervort Place*, by Tone Olaf Nielsen