

Authorship (ext)ended: artist, artwork, public and the curator: Ute Meta Bauer and Yvonne P. Doderer

interviewed by Annemarie Brand
and Monika Molnár

Annemarie Brand & Monika Molnár: We are currently at the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, where the exhibition, *Acts of Voicing. On the Poetics and Politics of the Voice* (October 12, 2012 – January 13, 2013) is showing. We would like to ask you both the role of the audience in an exhibition. In the context of this exhibition, the voice of the artist and the public are particularly important. Is it possible to think about this as a triangle; between the artists, audience and the curator?

Ute Meta Bauer: I have a problem with the term audience, I would rather talk about a “public” - the attempt of artists, curators to establish a public space. Because an audience to me is kind of passive. If you talk about a public you begin to establish a dialog among artists, curators and those who join a discourse, a crucial triangle. If I curate an exhibition I'd rather address a public than an audience.

Yvonne P. Doderer: I agree.

UMB: It is about dialogue. If you exhibit a work of art, you react to something. This dialogue engages different languages. But it is also about an exchange of experiences.

YPD: On the other hand, and at a certain point, the public is also alone, for example, during the visit of an exhibition: Because not in every moment is there a direct communication and interaction between artist, curator and public possible -

therefore not less curators and leaders of art institutions are organizing panels and talks functioning as a platform of exchange between producers, intermediators and recipients.

On the one hand, and at a certain point, the public is also not alone. For example, while visiting an exhibition it is not always possible for direct communication to occur between artist, curator and the public. Therefore, curators and directors of art institutions are organizing panels and talks, functioning as a platform of exchange between producers, intermediators and recipients. And at the end of the day maybe it is even, like Roland Barthes said in the *Death of the Author* (1967)¹, the issue that the public creates its own exhibition by its own ways of “reading” an exhibition.

UMB I don't think the public is ever alone.

YPD Not ever, but there are moments where the public is alone in and with the exhibition and the art works.

UMB As an artist you are also alone in the studio and as a curator when you develop your concept you are also usually alone.

AMB & MM: Do you mean alone physically or in an intangible way?

YPD I mean in both ways.

UMB The dialogue is what you produce, something what you generate.

YPD The – or better to say – a dialog is created by the exhibition already - although it might be not outspoken or being developed on inner level of reception.

UMB The artists generate a work, a position and the curator discovers the artist or a particular work, and then they communicate to a particular imaginary audience. This doesn't work that easy for me, its more complex. Artists are reacting upon what is going on around them, even if they say, "I am an artist with a unique position". Also a curator has her or his own agenda. I usually have an idea of what I want to show, and then I look at which artist corresponds with that and I even have an idea of who is going to see it. I think there is a triangle, but it might not be spoken communication.

AMB & MM How did your artistic collaboration begin?

YPD I do not remember exactly. Ute invited me when she was the director at the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, which in those days was starting to be well known in the international art scene.



UMB You also wrote for the magazine *META* that I edited. This is the result of such triangle. I met Yvonne first when she came to attend the exhibitions at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart and we shared conversations along with other regular guests. Knowing your public, already establishes a dialogue.

This is how our collaboration began. It's not just about a having a conversation; it's also about



entering together the field of production. At one point you recognize the people who come to attend your exhibitions and events are those who constitute a public. And what is crucial: conversations and collaborations generate friendships. For example the exhibition *Friends* (1993) at the Künstlerhaus, was exactly reflecting the situations that at some point the audience transforms into a highly valuable community.

YPD Our next collaboration that developed out of that was the project *Raumstruktur* for the exhibition *when tekkno turns to sound of poetry* at the Shedhalle Zurich 1994.²

UMB Yes, Sabeth Buchmann, Marion von Osten and Juliane Rebentisch invited us to produce the introduction text for this exhibition project. I suggested to Yvonne to produce a texture rather than a text, a kind of spatial narrative as a point of entry and reference for the whole project and *when tekkno turns turns to sound of poetry*.

YPD Moreover, it gave us a starting point, to refer to what was going on during the 1970s. During these years a lot of crucial things happened - in technology, in science, but also in society; for example the women's movement – second wave feminism got strong. In architecture the debate about structuralism began, in natural sciences biology, biotechnology and genetic research replaced physics as the leading

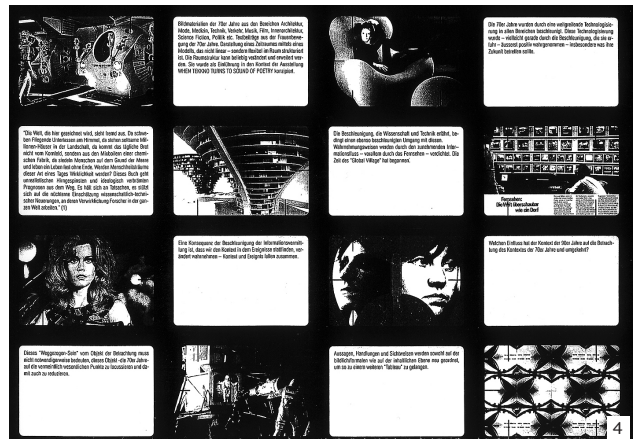
discipline - a lot of issues we are dealing with today originated in the 1970s. It is a indeed an interesting period, to have a look again into this decade - that's what our project was about. We repurposed the *House of Cards*, a modular system originally created by Ray and Charles Eames, by replacing their visuals with images and texts from the 1970s. Additionally we published a text-image collage in the art magazine ANYP edited by minimal club, that was later reprinted in a publication by curator Ine Gevers and artist Jeanne van Heeswijk.³



AMB & MM: Ute, in a talk at the Monash University in Melbourne you mentioned that in the past it was the artist who curated exhibitions or generated context to present their work; and the role of curator didn't exist at all. Do you think that in the present moment, the role of the artist has merged with the role of the curator⁴?

UMB Kind of. A century ago, artist movements would present themselves in shows that they conceived as artists. There weren't any curators. It was the artists themselves who would develop highly interesting concepts and install their exhibitions in a very particular way. Today the field of curating is more diversified; there are still many artists who keep control the way their exhibitions are curated, most likely if it comes to a solo show. Most artists have a very distinct idea of how their exhibition should look. There circulates still this myth "curators dominate artists," but in reality, there are not too many artists a curator can dominate. Artists have pretty strong egos.

Today for the first time there is a generation of trained curators, and of course this changes the practice of making exhibitions. In my generation, and that was widely the case, curators were trained art historians, artists, writers, former gallerists, you name it. My generation produced what one could call "amateur" curators who entered the field with a "learning by doing" approach. But my generation had a strong interest in what curating could and should mean in practice and theory, and that in a way initiated curatorial education and courses. It is kind of a similar process as it was the case with the first generation of artist exploring video and performance as a new practice. Those artists such as Joan Jonas, Bruce Nauman, Dara Birnbaum, Yvonne Rainer came from painting, were sculptors, were architects or dancers etc and experimented and experimented with this new media. This is how I came to curating as someone initially educated as a stage designer and artist. It was a new territory to explore, a new medium of artistic practice.



Take someone like Hans Ulrich Obrist, who is born in Switzerland, and who had this idea at pretty young age that he wanted to be an visionary curator like Harald Szeemann. Obrist was back then attending the renowned management school of St. Gallen, and he visited many well known artist with the plan to become a curator beyond what in those days determined a museum conservator or "Kustos". In those days the notion of a curator the way the term is understood today, simply did not exist or was not recognized as such, Without sounding to romantic - to be a curator was an obsession for my generation, rather that a profession.

YPD Indeed Hans Ulrich was also influenced by you.

UMB Hans Ulrich?

YPD I think so, no?

UMB No, I wouldn't say so. He was very interested and supported the projects I did, but his big inspiration was Harald Szeemann and his notion of the curator as "intellectual guest worker", but also Jean Christophe Amman and Kasper Koenig. But his early mentors were artists including Roman Signer, who was based in St. Gallen as Hans Ulrich, as well as Peter Fischli and David Weiss.

AMB&MM How does it feel to be a female artist-curator in the male dominated art world? Do you think anything has changed?

UMB I would say, since about ten years things have recognisably changed. Today women are directors of museums and biennales. There is still inequality, but the demography has definitely improved, actually more in the curatorial field than in the artist's field, where men still are the top sellers. where for the first The first time women to direct the Venice Biennale were Maria de Corral and Rosa Martinez⁵. It required obviously two women to equal one man for the president of the Biennale. Bice Curiger⁶ was the first woman to be fully in charge, more than a decade after Catherine David was the first woman to direct a Documenta. In that respect the field has changed, but there is still a "but...."

YPD If it comes to artists, I recently read a statistic compiled in Germany about the income of artists, comparing male to female. These statistics are from the years 1995 to 2000⁷ and I do not think that a lot has changed. Women earn about one third less than their male counterparts in the arts - similar to most other areas of employment, where women earn up to 28% less than men for the very same work.

UMB What I find dramatic and what we should also not forget is about how many professional people, internationally, are in indeed in the position to define a field. How many people do you have from Africa, from Latin America, from other places, who are really recognized and respected as top curators, especially of female? I think there is still a gap.

You have some influential women in so called power positions, but they most often work in the USA. It is more difficult for female curators in Latin America, the Middle East to serve in a top position, if you are belong to a family that is already in power. Sorry to say.

YPD You can add sexual identity as well, for example in the art world you can find way more gay men in influential positions or as well acknowledged artists while you find significantly less lesbians. Even more so there exists still a male heterosexual dominance, but also a gay male dominance. If we talk about race, class, gender, we can't exclude to reflect about sexual identity. Although the art scene is considered a much more open and pleasant scene as all the other professional fields, it is nevertheless not completely free from societal categories and norms especially if it comes to money and power.



UMB It's also about strong networks, how influential certain networks are, there is a reason why two decades ago there was quite a log of debated about "old boys networks". There is not less pressure in terms of local politics on the big players in the museum scene because of their strong trustees and collector base. In a number of Latin American countries, such as Brazil, Mexico, there is indeed a strong collector base. They want to see the art works they collect to be visible in major museums ranging from MoMa to Tate Modern, they support those museums and this creates the conditions for art history to be rewritten and more inclusive. Unfortunately its less due to the impact of scholars in the field who have called for this for decades, including the periodical *Third Text*, co-founded by Rasheed Areen to give an example.

It's much more complicated today than it was in the past. In Eastern Europe for example, women have been a major force in the cultural sector.

Women directed many Eastern European museums but it was considered then a less powerful field. In terms of the economies in Eastern Europe to be a museum director was not considered the same than to direct MoMA, the Met or the Louvre. You also have a close look at societal conditions; when is it attractive to hold a certain position? If we look a little deeper one understands the economic setting, this needs to be made more transparent and we need to be aware of those contexts and conditions.

Specifically for students at times it's not easy to understand why things are the way they are. If you understand the structure pattern underneath, it makes it easier to oppose such structures. In order to change the pattern, or disturb such systemic fixtures in a constructive way, you have to be familiar with its code. This is why theoretical education is so crucial also in our field, its kind of equivalent like computer programming or structural engineering, you need to know how its functioning in order to invent it anew..

AMBE&MM

How do you confront global and transcendent problems related to art production, as women? What are the gestures that made a radical turn in art history?

UMB There is currently an exhibition at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, *Mythos Atelier* (2012/2013) that is introducing the importance and relevance of the studio of the artist on artistic production and how this changed over time. Indeed a highly interesting subject. A colleague who saw the show told me that there are only two female artists included, although this vast show is spanning several centuries. No matter how you read this information – its telling a lot: maybe female artists did not have documented studios on their own, maybe they shared it with male artists, maybe they centuries ago worked under a male name. But in the last century women of course had their own studios, even if small or maybe their kitchen functioned as such. Having access to production determines the acceptance of being a female artist, so of course all of those aspects are critical.

Still twenty years ago, a gallery would tell you straight in your face, that they are hesitant to commit to female artists in their gallery programme, because they might have children and therefore a long term investment in their career is a bigger risk than supporting the career of a male artist. This luckily has changed.

YPD But until today this exclusion and invisibility of female productivity is continuing. Have a look into art lexica, you still find less female painters listed for example. The question is not only about re-inscribing female artists into art history to write history. An exhibition at the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt in 2008⁸ was focusing on female impressionists. On one hand this effort is positive in order to close the gap in art historical narratives, but on the other hand such exhibitions bare the danger of positive discrimination, the female artist becomes a kind of “specific species”. The discussion about gender, queer and transgender issues is by no means at an end point – not in the everyday, not in the art world.

UMB Yvonne, you are actually teaching gender studies as a professor in Duesseldorf. In the late nineties at the Academy of Fine Vienna we were also also introducing gender studies and colonial studies as a required subject into the fine art curriculum. On the other side we discussed that a focus on gender and postcolonial reading should be part of every class and subject we teach. For example, my colleague Sarat Maharaj is an art historian by training, and as he is of indian origin and grew up in South Africa. He is often asked to talk about art in India. But besides working indeed on post colonial debates and its challenges, he is a specialist in the work of Marcel Duchamp and has been close to Richard Hamilton over decades, he is kind of a “Joycean”, and that raises often a big surprise even amongst his art history peers.

YPD In terms of gender biology does not determine how you use or not use power.

And furthermore - the artistic and cultural fields are still open enough to offer various possibilities to introduce and produce a critical discourse about various issues - although this potential and freedom is in danger as in the rest of our societies and especially at universities. The economization of societies - successfully demanded and enforced by neoliberal politics - already demolished a lot of spaces and possibilities to create other practices and visions concerning life as well as art, culture and knowledge production.

UMB I still see the role of cultural institutions to serve as critical platforms, but it is less and less the case. I sense that the current crisis around the globe are not only economical although for sure they are driven by it, but I also sense a spiritual crisis, the loss of identities, ideologies and those getting reintro-

duced often in a very manipulative way. But in terms of art I experience a new ideology that is indeed the art market, and the market intrinsically rules art production. Art institutions in terms of acquisitions, currently are very depended of developments on the market, they have to compete with potent private collectors, the field became on the one side more open, more global, more influential but also way more complicated.

MM & AMB: What would be your recommendation for the next generation of curators, if any?

YPD: Meanwhile curating is taught at special courses, at academies and universities, it is no longer a practice you have to develop by yourself. And an academization always incorporates a certain distance to the topic and to the people – in this case to the artists and the public. Additionally institutions like universities and art academies like all scientific knowledge production operate within a specific power frame and field that determines the topics as well as the methods used to gain specific knowledge and to develop a certain practice. From my perspective these circumstances and power structures have to be kept in mind and to be reflected critically.

Notes

1 See details under <http://artblog.catherinehoman.com/roland-barthes-the-death-of-the-author-critical-summary/>

2 <http://archiv.shedhalle.ch/dt/programm/zeitung/06/vonosten/index.shtml>

3 Bauer, Ute Meta; Doderer, Yvonne P. "Raumstruktur". In: Gevers, Ine; van Heeswijk, Jeanne (eds.) *Beyond Ethics and Aesthetics*. Sun Publishers, Nijmegen 1997.

4 The entire talk can be accessed here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMko9dror4M>

5 <http://universes-in-universe.de/car/venezia/bien51/english.htm>; 51st Venice Biennial, 2005

6 <http://www.kunstaspekte.de/index.php?action=webpages&rk=9749>

7 <http://www.kulturrat.de/detail.php?detail=1293&rubrik=86>

8 <http://www.schirn-kunsthalle.de/>

Captions

1 Ute Meta Bauer & Yvonne P. Doderer: "Raumstruktur", modular system (1994 – 1995). Originally created for the exhibition "when tekno

turns to sound of poetry", Shedhalle Zurich, 1994 and Kunstwerke Berlin, 1995. Installation view from the exhibition "Oh, My Complex. On Unease at Beholding the City", Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, 2012.

2 Informationspace of "Bridge / The map is not the territory", a project commissioned by the working partnership Fleetinsel in cooperation with the Hamburg Department of Culture in 1997 – the section "Bridge" was curated by Ute Meta Bauer in collaboration with the artist Fared Armaly, who also developed the overall design of the whole project. Yvonne P. Doderer participated with "Topology & Research – a folding map".

3 Ute Meta Bauer & Yvonne P. Doderer collaborated on this exhibition in 2001. More details can be found here: <http://www.firststory.net/>

4 Ute Meta Bauer; Yvonne P. Doderer. "Raumstruktur". In: A.N.Y.P., Nr. 6, Minimal Club (Hg.), Berlin 1998

5 First Story – Women Building / New Narratives for the 21st Century: View on Decide for Yourself by Women on Waves, Porto 2001 photo © Rita Burmester

Ute Meta Bauer is Associate Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, USA and was educated as artist at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Hamburg where she received her Diploma with Honours in Visual Communication/Stage Design in 1987. Since 25 years she is a curator of exhibitions and presentations on contemporary art, film, video and sound, with a focus on transdisciplinary formats. She publishes regularly on artistic and curatorial practice and education, co-edited *Intellectual Birdhouse. Artistic Practice as Research with Florian Dombois, Michael Schwab and Claudia Mareis* (London, 2012) and as well World Biennale Forum No 1 – Shifting Gravity together with Hou Hanru (*Ostfildern, Gwangju*, 2013).

Yvonne P. Doderer works in scientific, artistic and cultural fields as researcher, author, lecturer and cultural producer. Currently she is Professor at the University of Applied Sciences in Düsseldorf, visiting lecturer at the Merz Academy in Stuttgart and head of the "Office for Transdisciplinary Research and Cultural Production". Doderer studied architecture and urban planning at the Technical University of Stuttgart and completed her PhD with excellence at the University of Dortmund, Faculty of Spatial Planning. Her research and production areas focus on Urban and Spatial Theories, Gender, Media and Cultural Studies as well as Contemporary Art.