COLLABORATION

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The success of *Scope: Contemporary Research Topics (Art)* is dependent on the contributions of artists and writers as well as on the critical support of a range of reviewers. In this second issue of the journal, the editors thank all contributors and reviewers for their involvement with *Scope (Art)*. We are incrementally building the quality of the journal and cannot do this without you.

This time we also include contributions from a number of artists/writers who are part of our research and teaching networks in New Zealand and abroad. Other contributors to this issue are current or previous staff members or senior students at Otago Polytechnic School of Art.

Scope (Art) is not a themed journal. Nonetheless, this issue includes many instances of collaborative work. The networking implied in the paragraph above is already indicative of collaboration, a practice which is also present in other registers within the issue. Some contributors have jointly responded to the same exhibitions; some writers have worked alongside artists; some authors have worked together on topics; artists' pages often refer to communities of practice; acknowledgements accompanying writing mention various kinds of collaborative support and personal mentoring; curators write about the work of artists on group shows or refer to members of the general public involved in a community project; and images included courtesy of many artists and photographers hint at the extensive networking in the background of the work presented in this issue.

Collaboration in the visual arts and its concomitant exhibition or publication does not always happen in seamless ways. Rather, the tensions inherent in such a practice are often noticeable and sometimes acknowledged. Power relations between co-workers are suggested. We live in an era which admits to the complexities of authorship post Michel Foucault's writing on the "death of the author"[1] and Roland Barthes' insistence on an "intertextuality" through which meaning is never fixed but constantly in the process of production.[2] N Katherine Hayles has also pointed out that our posthuman condition foregrounds systems rather than individual agency.[3] Nevertheless, the self as locus for the initiation – at least – of art as a resistant and critical practice, remains insistent and necessarily so. Collaboration is not a simple matter.

John Roberts, in "Collaboration as a Problem of Art's Cultural Form" published in *Third Text* in 2004, argues that we should not confuse collaboration as a critical ideal with the sharing of ideas or with art's general position within the social division of labour whereby artists have always worked with technicians, assistants, partners or fellow journeymen. Peter Cleverley writes in this issue[4] of the "kindship" experienced between artists from different cultural contexts in the face of various types of fundamentalisms. In "Tinkering" published in the *London Review of Books* in 2007, Mark Greif identifies four types of collaboration: where the naïve artist works with performers without a script; where the aged or busy superskilled artist leaves much of the work to studio assistants; where "in-betweeners" draw intervening frames in, for example, animation projects; and where artists marry conceptualism with the handicrafts provided by artisans, as in the case of some of the works by Jeff Koons.[5] But, Roberts also defines collaboration as a critical ideal (although one could argue that this ideal can overlap with the types of collaboration identified by Greif). Roberts writes:

> Collaboration is a self-conscious process of production…the socially produced character of art is made explicit *in* the form of the work. Teamworking, sharing skills and ideas across disciplines, manipulating prefabricated materials (the labour of others), negotiating with various institutions and agencies, become the means whereby art's place within the social division of labour is made transparent as a form of socialised labour…Authorship is defined as multiple and diffuse.[6]

Further on in his article, Roberts makes the crucial point: Collaboration as a critical ideal is not just a matter of artistic interdisciplinarity, it also has a political agenda and a history of political alliance whereby workers claimed the right to organise themselves in the face of whatever systems threatened their survival. He refers to the 1920s when organised artistic collaboration staked out a socialist agenda for many artists; and then arrives at the 1960s and its continued legacy in Western art, a legacy which acts recuperatively to continue resistance of, now, late capitalist manoeuvres which[7] insist that the labour time expended on a commodity should not exceed the amount of labour time socially needed to produce it. Such an insistence plays into the interests of a capitalist system bent on subsuming labour into a drive for efficiency, not least through the proliferation of technological bureaucracy in the workplace. "The subjective skills of the worker have to be minimalised and controlled if the social forms of labour are to be [institutionally] internalised technocratically [through] separation of the intellect from the expenditure of [manual] labour..."[8] Still further on, Roberts claims that "…the critical interdisciplinarity of the group, and as such the breakdown of the separation between manual and intellectual labour, is an attempt to challenge the one-sided development of technology, to reforge it in the interest of a collective spontaneous subjectivity."[9] He continues: "Collaboration through art, then, becomes the cultural form through which the aesthetic critique of [bureaucratic] uses of technology is played out. This is what I mean by the ideal of collective participation in art being a space of social experimentation and speculation."[10]

It seems very important, however, to also point out that Roberts refuses the collapse of art into social practice. He argues that the "instability of art as a category and a phenomenological experience is precisely what constitutes its relationship to freedom and human emancipation." He critiques the current ascendancy of post-autonomy in debates about collaboration through which the voice of the self in the production of art is relegated to the past – for example by Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics.[11] Despite this ascendancy, he lauds the current debate on collaboration as a site for the overlap between the discussion of art and the discussion of labour: "In a period where the labour of the artist and the labour of the worker are largely hidden as values, this is what underwrites the significance of the turn to collaboration today. The debate on collaboration is the means whereby labour *in* the artwork is made conspicuous and critical."[12]

Returning to a consideration of the contents of this issue of *Scope (Art)*, I argue that the hidden or naturalised labour of the artist is uncovered where artists and writers coincide in the same author or where more than one author participates in any given project. Difference in role or difference in perspective triangulates contributions between artist-writer-artwork or quadrangulates them between artist-writer-artwork-writer. Thus, difference – and often the concomitant tensions – works in favour of the presencing of labour.

While Roberts critiques the impact of institutions and their late capitalist manoeuvres in his article, this issue of *Scope (Art)* has, however, been made possible by the institution – Otago Polytechnic – in which our School of Art is situated. There are a number of factors which sets this institution apart and outside the frame of such a critique as Roberts': Firstly, it is extraordinarily generous with support – for example through grant assistance – for research in which manual, studio-based work and intellectual endeavour are integrated. Secondly, its recently published "Intellectual Property Policy" must be amongst the most generous to artists on faculty in the world. Through a separation between researchers' full ownership of the outcomes of their work and co-ownership between the institution and researchers' outputs in relation to performance-based research funding for the institution, a mutually beneficial strategy is reached. In this way an 'us-them' binary has been avoided with the excess of self-initiated labour in the School of Art as a continuing and productive result. Thirdly, initiatives such as *Scope (Art)* – and soon

Above: Dadang Christanto, 2000 (and ongoing), *Continuous Drawing* (detail), mixed drawing media, size variable (courtesy of the artist).

Right: Dadang Christanto, 1996-97, *They Give Evidence* (detail), mixed sculptural media, about life-size (courtesy of the artist).

also *Scope (Flexible Learning)* and *Scope (Design)* – are amply supported without censorship of its contents or institutional involvement with editorial decisions or reviewing processes. Collaborative practices included in this issue are, therefore, nowhere strident. However, they are very much in evidence as artists and arts writers remain vigilant in the face of international capitalist and neo-conservative pressures on the freedoms of art *and* labour they champion.

There are, of course, also other dangers facing artists and arts writers and the societies in which they work. This was brought starkly under our attention when Indonesian-born (of Chinese descent) artist Dadang Christanto recently visited the School of Art to contribute to our Public Research Seminar Prrogramme – itself another forum for the collaborative sharing of ideas, practices and experiences. Christanto now resides in Australia, where his work is exhibited and published. His life and that of his family in Indonesia were, however, fraught with the danger and exclusion dealt to those belonging to the Chinese minority during the Suharto regime (1966-1998).

Christanto shared several of his projects with his audience during the seminar. All of these function to critique and to commemorate the atrocities perpetrated on the Chinese minority in Indonesia. The artist's own father was one of many Chinese who suffered genocide in that country in the mid-1960s, when the artist was eight years old. The elder Christanto was one of half a million victims of the purge of PKI (Indonesia Communist Party) members, sympathisers and Chinese persecuted for their political and religious beliefs and ethnicity.

Through his *Continuous Drawing* created from 2000 and still ongoing, Christanto refuses a forgetfullness of that atrocity. Recently in Auckland during a residency at the School of Visual Arts at Manukau Institute of Technology, the artist added to this drawing, making sure that its agency remains current in the memory of events in Indonesia. His additions consist of small graphic marks – one for each of the enormous number of victims as the drawing

grows – amidst ribbons of black and red suggestive of death and bloodletting which also function as celebrations of the lives of the deceased.

They Give Evidence is one of Christanto's sculptural installations. It consists of sixteen male and female figures that represent victims of political oppression. They bear in their arms remnants of clothing testifying to the torture, mutilations and beatings the bodies who wore them had to endure. The figures are about life-size and they silently confront our bodies with their testimonies. Today, one cannot but read this work without thinking of the "Emperor's Silent Army" which consists of eight thousand life-size terracotta figures unearthed in 1974 in China and currently on display in London. These exquisitely detailed figures were buried with the First Emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi, in Shaanxi Province in China during the second century BCE and now mutely testify to the power and resources of the Chinese Empire. Christanto's figures seem pared down and hollow-eyed in comparison; rather than power, they exude tragedy. However, the same fierce pride can be noticed in the stance of both the figures in his installation and in those excavated some decades ago in China.

Here, in New Zealand, we are presently enabled through the Treaty of Waitangi and the opportunities it affords to celebrate the culture of Māori, the tangata whenua or people of the land, and by extension the cultures of minorities in the country. Such opportunities can include collaborative practices between Māori and Pākehā – (New Zealanders of European descent). Master of Fine Arts candidate Roka Hurihia Ngarimu-Cameron is a Māori weaver of long standing. Recently, she joined our postgraduate cohort to research ways in which her culture and that of Pākehā could intersect. One result of this is a traditional koruwai, or particular kind of floor-length cloak, made from harakeke or flax fibre used for the weft and European cotton linen used for the warp. This is the first time a traditional koruwai has been woven on a Western loom. A process leading to this work is narrated by the artist in an essay entitled "Toku Haerenga/My Journey" in this issue of the journal. This text provides an insight into a journey of moving from the security of one culture to voluntarily interact with another in one's homeland. In doing so it stands in stark contrast – being in the same issue of the journal and including images of the koruwai – to the garments imaged in Christanto's sculptural work.

There are also other contrasts and tensions evident within this issue of *Scope (Art)* and the editors invite readers to explore these and to consider contributing to future issues of the journal.

1 Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?", in Charles Harrison & Paul Wood (eds), *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (London: Blackwell, 1969/1994), 923-28.

2 Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text", in Charles Harrison & Paul Wood (eds), *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (London: Blackwell, 1971/1994), 940-46.

3 N Katharine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Information* (Chicago: Chicago University Press).

4 See Peter Cleverley's artist's pages in this issue.

5 Mark Greif, "Tinkering", *London Review of Books*, 7 June 2007: 11.

6 John Roberts, "Collaboration as a Problem of Art's Cultural Form", *Third Text*, 18 (6), 2004: 557.

7 Ibid., 560.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 560-61.

10 Ibid., 561.

11 Ibid., 563.

12 Ibid., 564.