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Invisible Culture

An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture

Introduction: To Incorporate Practice

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When the topic for this issue was initially formulated—to investigate the processes of work in distinction from the product—the call for papers asked: How can we understand work, not as a “task” geared toward a final product-object, but as a process whose “products” may be multiple, unidentifiable, or ephemeral? The purpose here was twofold: to reevaluate the ways in which we analyze or describe the activity called work, and to consider artistic practices that are often unrecognizable within critical methodologies focusing on the final product or representation. The idea was to concentrate on the *operations* of practice (such as the way in which an apparatus is employed, or a body incorporates habits or rituals), in order to situate the temporal space of work.

After receiving the articles, it became apparent that the dialogue generated by the texts concentrated less on this notion of “work” than on the *corporeal* or dynamic relation between subjects and objects, environments, or activities. Thus the title of this issue, “To incorporate practice,” draws on the textual play implicit in the infinitive “to incorporate”: to take in or include practice; to absorb into the body through gestures or habits; to embody an activity. In *The Logic of Practice* Pierre Bourdieu proposes that, on the one hand, through the body’s incorporation of *habitus* an institution “attains full realization”; and, on the other, in that process of incorporation the physical gesture of the practice potentially, and necessarily, exceeds those habits.¹ Each of these articles addresses what it means to engage practice as a generative force without a singular objective, and they attempt to situate practices that are open to continuous revision. They present artistic or curatorial practices whose potential as cultural phenomena are not circumscribed, and whose future is not bound by a discrete aim. In the act of producing, the body enacts; it produces “objects” that are in excess of the apparent end. These articles effectively question what unforeseen possibilities might emerge *from within* the limits of a practice.

Catherine de Zegher’s article, “*The Inside is the Outside: The Relational as the*

(Feminine) Space of the Radical,” considers the significance of practice from a feminine vantage. Through a discussion of women artists working in the late twentieth century (Anna Maolino, Lygia Clark, Cecilia Vicuna, and Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger), de Zegher situates practices that develop a radical criticality, defined not by “alienation, separation, negativity...” as it was with the historical avant-garde, but rather by “inclusion, connectivity, attaching and constituting attitudes.” Drawing on Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler, de Zegher’s analysis of Maolino locates a practice that runs counter to the split between inside and outside, or bodily processes and physical practice. She suggests that somatic, even digestive-like movements, might be integral processes of the “artistic trajectory.” If the subject’s “inside is the outside,” then there is a continuous relationship between the subject’s external practice of drawing relations and her own constitution.

In “Kurt Schwitters’ *Merzbau*: The Desiring House,” Jaleh Mansoor revisits the house in Hanover that the Dadaist worked and reworked over a period of nearly twenty years. In this “continuous project altered daily,” Schwitters engaged a process of “cutting and connecting,” in which objects and detritus were allowed to enter new relations within the crevices and tunnels of a constantly rebuilt architectural structure. *Merzbau*, Mansoor writes, “hardly presents a formal object—identifiable and able to be categorized as sculpture or architecture. Instead, we find a ceaseless flow of material aggregation and the habitual production of its own production.” Like de Zegher, Mansoor suggests that we must question the limit between the processes of the body’s interior and those of its exterior, or between socially dictated organizations, and the body’s introjection of those organizations. For, as Schwitters *internalized* the “techno-social” machine of everyday practices (such as cutting and nailing everyday material detritus), the body’s somatic processes are also defined as a machine.

In “‘Pictures made of wool’: The Gender of Labor at the Bauhaus Weaving Workshop (1919-23),” I situate the feminized status of the weaving at the Bauhaus. Given that the discursive history of Western production tends to place task-orientation, manual labor, and maintenance on the side of “women’s work,” we might inquire into labor’s “feminized” connotation. In Max Weber’s *General Economic History* (1923), the German social theorist defines “women’s work” as that which, unlike “men’s work,” lacks a theoretical aspect. My essay departs from this problematic gendering of labor in modernity and in discussions of handicraft as placed in comparative inferiority to art. Attempting to generate a theory for the medium of weaving as it developed at the Bauhaus, my article explores the characteristics of a practice (weaving) paradoxically ontologized through history as “feminine” and “laborious,” and the way in which its physical, corporeal (perhaps “feminine”) aspect remains present in spite of the end product (the weaving).

Margot Bouman's article, "The Temporality of the Public Sphere: *Orpheus Descending's* Loop between Art and Culture," looks at Paul Pfeiffer's video installation, as it was situated in the overpass between the World Financial Center and the World Trade Center from April through June 2001. Though critics originally questioned the efficacy of this piece's attempt to reach a "public audience" because of its spatial position within an architectural environment where commuters pass distracted by commercial signage, Bouman argues that the commuter audience is "*built into*" the piece itself. Thus *Orpheus Descending*, as it existed for a specified time in this passageway, drew on, and "incorporated," the temporal condition of the environment and the "repetitious cycle of [workers] coming-and-going, to-ing and fro-ing" through that space. Bouman questions what it means to receive and understand public art in a site predicated less on stability and attention than on temporality and distraction. She asks what kind of practice can be actualized in the temporal space of the "loop."

In her article "On the edge of the field: Airplanes and Art World Revisited," Leena-Maija Rossi addresses the ethics of curatorial practice in a contemporary art world that is contingent on, and productive of, globalization. An art world of "biennials and triennials," increasingly bounded by airplane travel and a more or less touristic relationship to cities and cultures, must also, Rossi points out, negotiate the ambiguities and involvedness of the current political landscape. As an art critic and curator, she calls for a curatorial practice that engages a constant self-reflection on its exhibition themes, as well as its hierarchies, in order to open up possibilities for artistic practices that are outside the dominant, global "art world." Having revisited the essay after some time, Rossi's current questions are the product of a shifting cultural and political landscape since the article's second version, written just after the September 11th attacks. The essay suggests that the practice of writing, or critical engagement, must bear the weight of new layers—it must incorporate new developments, such as those in the Middle East, and their impact on social situations and relationships throughout the world.

All of the papers in this issue attempt, in various ways, to address the *weight* of practice in carrying out the habits and rituals, or modes of production, of everyday life and dominant regimes. As bodies incorporate work practices through or within apparatuses and architectural environments, they become porous with the "outside" circumstances of political events; at the same time, they produce that which they incorporate anew, differently.

1. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). See in particular the chapter "Structures, habitus, practices," 55, 57.

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