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States of Transition:

Art in the Urban Contexts of Detroit, Baltimore and Hamburg

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Who and What Drives Artists, Makers and Art Organizers in Cities Like Detroit, Baltimore and Hamburg?

This collection of texts, thoughts, encounters, statements and interviews by artists, makers, researchers and pioneers has been assembled as the result of a series of research travels to the city of Detroit, and Baltimore as well as Hamburg conducted in fall, 2011. Considering the possibilities and limits of contemporary art and its circulation within museums, cultural institutions, commercial galleries and urban lifestyle networks, this booklet intends to look at the intersections of where art and creative social engagement meet and how this affects the transformation of urban space in the different cities.

This booklet should give you an insight into current art discourse-insights from the point of view of art-makers and supporters. They will tell you how their thrive, develop and shape their cities through artistic action. As insiders they reflect and react upon how interdisciplinary community art projects approach the idea of urban renewal and how it eventually affects people and the infrastructure around them.

After visiting various sites of art production in the aforementioned cities, I asked a selection of people coming from different positions to write about their own experiences, their opinions and their practices in relation to artistic initiatives and cultural engagement with the effects of urban development in particular neighborhoods or in their own city.

DETROIT AS A STARTING POINT

At the start of this decade Detroit received a lot of national and international media attention for the artistic initiatives, urban homesteading, engaged microeconomics and other successful creative revitalization within the city. The Motor City had always been known for its

once fast-growing and wealthy automotive industry, which, in its post-industrial period over the last 20 years has suffered severe shrinkage in population due to unemployment, bankruptcy and drug addiction.

It is only now that the negative identity associated with the city is slowly changing. Maybe it's because of the lack of bureaucratic control and the financially disastrous situation that Detroit offers an opportunity for practicing other models of investing in and thinking about a city. Rather than retreating to standard forms of tailored production and mainstream capitalism, it is possible to revive architecture, space and relationships as well as engage in art-making in all sorts of other ways which create an economy independent from global corporations and self-sustainable.

Within the existing parameters Detroit's inhabitants have started to set up their own small-scale economies to keep their neighborhoods alive, safe and reflective of what they want from their city. Over the last years, the city (center) has been reclaimed by local artists and its potential acknowledged by smaller businesses. Furthermore different parts of the city have been activated by artistic interventions and become sites for initiating intentional communities, social art projects as well as other unique modes of city development such as urban farming. But this is not only a local drive: more and more artists and makers from outside Detroit see an opportunity to work and dwell within the texture of the city.

Starting with FILTER DETROIT[1] – a research residency for artists, makers, architects and thinkers in a single-family home in 2009 – I was interested to experience what propels contemporary art production in and for Detroit? Over the course of three years I have been able to meet various creative practitioners, discuss as well as engage in some of the artistic initiatives in the city – resulting in more questions about the potential of the infrastructures and resources in this city and their long-term development.

This booklet contains a sampling of those practices and perspectives. Detroiter, gallery co-owner and writer, Steve Hughes compares his support and involvement with the local artistic community to growing produce. Sille Storhile, a Norwegian artist who spent a few weeks in Detroit for an artist's residency, speculates about Detroit's resilient, dominant narrative of progress embedded in its history. As new pioneers to the city, The Hinterlands reflect on their production and performance of a Wild West Show, which allowed them to think about the responsibilities of creative people who find themselves part of a process of gentrification. Artist and art professor, Chido Johnson closes the chapter about Detroit with thoughts on a shift in the city's art production, away from intended outcomes to focus on the process of production.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICTS IN BALTIMORE

During my time in Detroit many talks and discussions with people from the city pointed me towards similar developments and artistic action in Baltimore. Though the rebuilding of Baltimore is some steps ahead of what is happening in Detroit, both of these American cities have struggled with the collapse of their industrial industries and population shrinkage. In Baltimore as well as Detroit, the majority of the population is Afro-American. And due to a continuing influx of immigrants, a diverse range of cultures influences each city. The history of these cities are however, very different.

Baltimore is often called a suburb of the governmental district Washington D.C. and is able to offer at least basic educational infrastructures as well as public transportation to its citizens. Baltimore's city limits prevented the endless sprawl of suburbia, whereas Detroit's highway system allowed that expansion. Until today, Baltimore's geographic location is more attractive for commuters to live in while doing business in neighbor cites such as New York City or Washington D.C.

Nevertheless Baltimore has to grapple with depopulated areas and connect (segregated) neighborhoods, separated over the last decades. One of the successful initiatives to populate the vacant city center came with the installation of an Arts & Entertainment District called Station North. The State of Maryland was the first state in the country to sponsor Arts and Entertainment Districts as a means of stimulating the economy and improving quality of life. This change in zoning laws has been supported by the local government. Thus living and working in the same space (for the most part former industrial buildings) has been made possible and less bureaucratic for artists' initiatives and developers to pursue inexpensible changes in the functions of buildings, while still offering tax incentives for investors.

Certainly the situation of Station North and its infrastructures are key for such a development. Historically the main street of the Station North District, North Avenue, used to be the entertainment district of Baltimore before TV took over that role, entertaining people in their homes rather.

In this chapter, Gary Kachadourian – an artist and initiator of a number of grassroots arts initiatives – reflects on the community action produced in the form of art-making. When one considers the transformation of districts, streets and quarters in a city with the engagement and interaction of artists, some might suspect that the cultural events and arts need to be presented as "consumer friendly". For Sue Spaid, director of the Contemporary Museum in Baltimore, it is the responsibility of established institutions, at the top, to nurture themselves as a kind of platform where multiple audiences and art scenes collide. For Spaid, it is only through this interchange that a thriving cultural discourse is made sustainable and accessible. The emergence of community and socially-oriented art appear to be the outcomes of two converging histories for Hugh Pocock, an art professor at the Maryland Institute College of Art. On the one hand he refers to the defunding of artists and art projects, and on the other he points to the artist's practice in relation to commodification and the entrenched

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power structures embedded in existing infrastructures such as museums or galleries.

WHY HAMBURG IN THIS CONTEXT?

One can say Hamburg has it all. In opposition to the cities of Detroit and Baltimore, Hamburg is a growing metropolis with a fully developed infrastructure for its population. From the outside it may seem that Hamburg has a great deal of public art institutions as well as a thriving commercial gallery scene. But the façade represents an illusion. Public art funding has been in crisis for many years, not only because of the global economic situation, but for many reasons.

The already established art institutions barely survive on public funding, hardly able to program, foster art production or support their local artists. These institutions have to deal with the fact that the imperatives of the creative industry force them to produce discourse and art in a consumer-friendly manner. For less established art initiatives, the movement of artists to cheaper production and living spaces such as Berlin and Brussels, not to mention the fact that art funding from foundations and other non-governmental sources is getting scarce, make sustainability and exchange almost impossible. To establish a healthy regard of art production as an important part of the stabilizing system in a city is getting difficult for makers. More likely art is finding itself functionalized as a motor for gentrification – increasing the living quality and property value of some neighborhoods, forcing, ironically, the artists to move out or only stay for a short period of time.

With his larger study on arts, culture and urban development in Hamburg Volker Kirchberg, professor at the department Organization and Distribution of Arts and Culture at the Leuphana University Lüneburg (DE), elucidates the interdependencies of cultural politics and infrastructures. His research results, as well as the observations in Detroit and Baltimore, lead us to question what kind of role artists and art production plays in urban development and the revitalization of neighborhoods.

THE END

The voices in this publication speak of their own experience in relation to the cities they live in. Other people may have different opinions on these cities' artistic infrastructures. To supplement these perspectives about artistic engagement, participation, as well as urban transformation in neighborhoods through culture, I recommend that each of you readers go and experience these elements for yourselves, in the places you're in.

What positions do artists occupy in their cities? Are they organizers, activists or city dwellers? Creating small enterprises producing food, goods, and services for local community markets is one way of shaping a city by its civilians. Another form of activation is occupying space and designing sustainable tools for social interaction. All these creative cultural forces and knowledge build up alternative structures for production, education, entertainment and living together. The mediation and establishment of cultural models for knowledge exchange, transformation of space, and strategies of supporting interdisciplinary projects within the realm of visual culture, depend on the collaboration and power relations between various players in the cultural field.

Living and working in one location is important to build up a longer-lasting cultural infrastructure, and yet one has to position oneself, reflect and act upon the fact that gentrification can be the result of this. If I'm honest, to some extent I think gentrification in certain parts of Detroit for example will improve the devastation in these neighborhoods. In other areas in Hamburg however, I wish that people had acted more responsibly towards their own well-being as communities. It seems like that each period of rapid growth in these cities, is followed by a period of decline and radical change. The question remains of not only whether we are able but whether we are ready to claim the right to these cities?

Thanks to the Goethe Institut for the research travel grant for curators, without which I would have not been able to spend time in Baltimore and dwell in the artistic scene of Detroit. My heartfelt appreciation goes to all the artists, makers, doers, dwellers, shapers, initiators, citizens of Detroit, Baltimore and Hamburg. Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences and reflections about your city.

SUE
SPAID

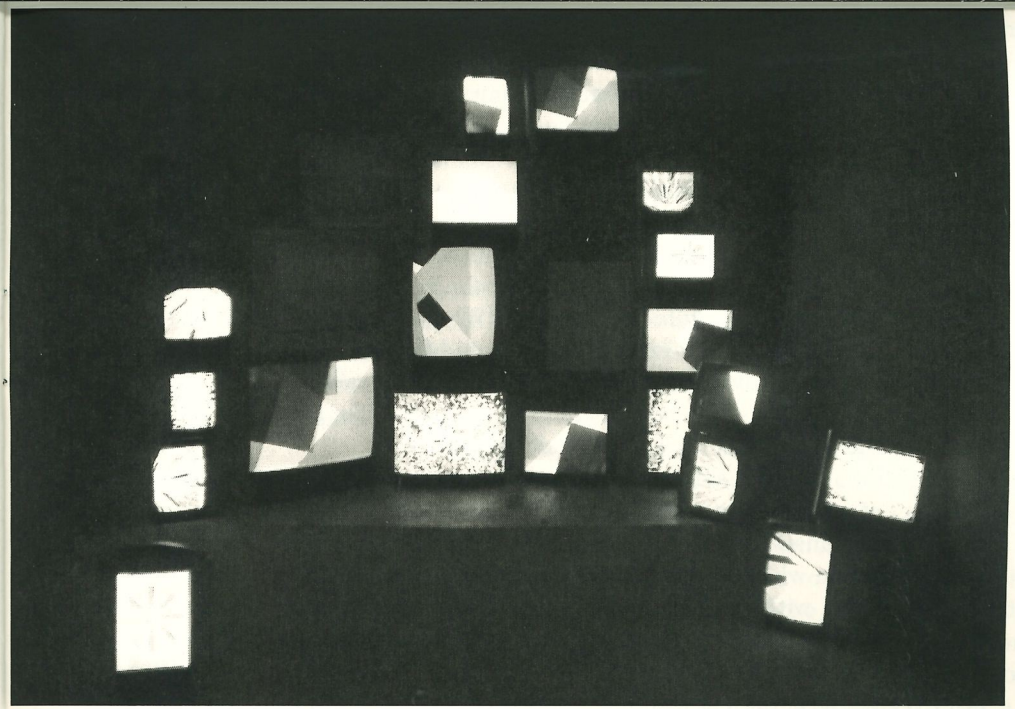
Does the Top Need the Bottom?

Soon after Sue Spaid Fine Art in Los Angeles (1990-1995) opened – one of the first galleries to represent 50% female and 50% male artists – artist Joe Lewis (co-founder of South Bronx's Fashion Moda a decade earlier and current Dean of UC Irvine's School of the Arts), flat-out told me, "the top needs the bottom." I've never forgotten this point.

To a young gallerist, this view seemed counter-intuitive since I felt beholden to those with money to purchase the affordable, critically- acclaimed art I routinely exhibited. Moreover, the only time the top seemed to need the younger galleries was when museums suddenly wanted us to donate artworks for their auctions, so as to appear "hip" showcasing emerging art at drastically reduced prices. These were to be sold to those very same "patrons" we had been prepping all along! Despite Lewis' claim's apparent contradictions, I still find myself musing it over.

Over the past two decades, I've participated in five burgeoning DIY art scenes: Los Angeles in the nineties, NYC during Y2K, Cincinnati in the early aughties, Philadelphia in the late aughties and now Baltimore in the teens. My one-year stint in NYC was especially productive. I led impromptu colloquies concerning feminism and perceptual practices, performed during two DIY evenings of performance art, organized a DIY fashion show on a Tribeca street and curated a day of art/performances on a Staten Island Ferry. After functioning solely as a DIY instigator for fifteen years, I became Curator at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1999 and this museum's Executive Director a decade later. Am I on top or still at the bottom? In some ways, little has changed from my days as a renegade LA gallerist!

Rather than bemoan how my destiny is still tied, perhaps more than ever, to those on top, I want to discuss what I've learned from



Top, installation at the Contemporary Museum Baltimore; bottom, activity, visitors and art at the Contemporary Museum Baltimore, all photos by Sue Spaid

enacting Joe's observation/advice. My goal here is to pose a challenge to other contemporary art institutions interested to test how much "the top needs the bottom." Of course, our society is less hierarchical than we were just twenty years ago. We rarely categorize museums and artist-run spaces as either "tops" or "bottoms." However, so long as artists are keen to show in museums, which they feel ignore them, then museums are "tops"...in a way.

A true equivalence is when museums/artist-run spaces have either a more fluid relationship, or the artists actually have absolutely no interest to exhibit in museums. When artists have never visited the museums they claim to reject, their indifference doesn't count as such. One can only dismiss something one knows really well, not something one studiously avoids. Some artists act a bit like guys who bad-mouth the gals whom they actually desire!

On a side note, I do worry that the recent professionalization of curators, with all the curatorial schools, museum/gallery internships and institutionally-tracked careers, diminishes the value of the DIY track, which supplies a life-long itinerary. When compared to institutions with pre-determined preferences such as collecting museums and/or galleries, the DIY track provides an open-ended education. Collections necessarily practice exclusion, limiting opportunities for young curators to build relationships with artists beyond their immediate circle, never mind the chance to gain confidence as advocates of some "outside" scene.

Curators working outside the system have always helped to expand the orbit surrounding collections/stables. Museum/gallery jobs leave little extra time to explore/test diverse/untested artistic practices. No wonder young curators tend to lack the skills needed to commission works, while many despair when they realize what it takes to promote less familiar works by famous artists, let alone emerging artists.

Soon after arriving at the Contemporary, I noticed how rarely emerging artists visited the museum, even though Baltimore is home to eight art schools, including three MFA programs, and is famous for retaining its artist-inhabitants once they leave school. Moreover, half of the Contemporary's visitors are out-of-town tourists and 72% of our members live nearly ten miles away. If we had a super-huge traffic, like MOMA, these demographics might not sound so strange. But if half of your 6000 visitors are from out of town, you begin to wonder what's up with the locals, especially since Baltimore is renowned for its DIY scene, which sprouted up nearly a decade ago.

I began to wonder whether local artists were intentionally boycotting the Contemporary. When we invited representatives from the artist-run spaces to meet with us, no one responded. I became even more convinced that something odd was afoot! I soon learned that few of them had ever visited the Contemporary. We were somehow floating beyond their orbit, even though we shared complementary goals and most artist-run galleries are less than a five-minute walk away. We're all championing deserving, under-recognized artists by providing them exhibition opportunities. Our second appeal, which suggested we meet on a Saturday afternoon, resulted in a quorum, enabling us to devise a game plan that met everybody's needs and addressed everyone's concerns. And as they say, the rest is history.

Not only is what transpired one of the highlights of my life, but the Contemporary certainly couldn't have pulled this off without the local DIY scene's collaborative input. I proposed that we call the month-long series of twelve solo exhibitions (four simultaneous, week-long exhibitions) "Baltimore Liste," after two similarly-structured series of one-week exhibitions: BERLINER LISTE and Basel LISTE which feature solo shows by artists under 40 in galleries open less than five years.

Our group decided that each of the seven artist-run spaces, which are mostly older than five years, would nominate three any-age artists, whom I would visit to select for "Baltimore Liste." During the month of April, I visited the nominated artists and sent out a press release announcing my selections, only two weeks before the first opening in May. To my surprise, most of the artists I selected would soon have their first ever solo exhibition under my watch (most of Baltimore's DIY spaces are too huge for solo shows) and many took this opportunity to complete/produce entirely new works! Over a three-week period, a new crew arrived like clockwork each Sunday evening to install their works, just as the prior week's exhibitors de-installed. Each Wednesday, we reopened with an entirely new show, requiring me to compose five new didactic panels each week (one for each artist, plus one that attempted to connect all the works presented). Every Friday we then hosted a reception, drawing hundreds of local artists back to the museum. Our tag line was "Every Day is May Day in May!"

On one hand, "Baltimore Liste" mightily demonstrates how much the top needs the bottom to build audience and attention for its programs. However, I think ours is a fluid relationship that ultimately flattens hierarchy, otherwise I doubt the artists would be so keen to participate. More recently, our museum has become homeless, since we are renovating a new space. Our new relationships have enabled us to collaborate with these same spaces again, co-presenting our programs there. And we're searching for spaces where we can present "Baltimore Liste 12" in May!

is an initiative that constitutes itself between research, art, urban development and social initiative in Detroit hosting research resident artists, filmmakers, writers, musicians and activists in a family home in a Detroit neighborhood.
http:// www.filter-hamburg.com

HUGH POCOCK was born in New Zealand and raised in the United States. His work seeks to investigate the interdependent ecologies of nature, industry and culture. Over the past twenty years, Pocock has shown his work across the United States, in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Antonio as well as internationally in the former Soviet Union, Germany and China. He has also exhibited his work in galleries and museums including Portikus in Frankfurt, Germany, the Wexner Museum, the Santa Monica Museum of Art and the Baltimore Museum of Art; as well as in "non-art sites" such as private homes and movie theatres. He is living and working in Baltimore, Maryland and is teaching Sculpture, Video and Social Practice courses that focus on the impact of Climate Change and issues of Sustainability at Maryland Institute College of Art.
http://hughpocock.info

SUE SPAID, Executive Director of the Contemporary Museum, has been active in the art world as a collector, art writer, curator and university lecturer since 1984. She is currently coordinating a five-museum tour of Patricia Johanson's career survey "The World As it Is: The Art of Patricia Johanson, 1960-2012". While Curator at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati (1999-2002), she authored the book *Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies* that accompanied the 2002 exhibition she co-curated with Amy Lipton. As an independent curator, she has organized well over 50 exhibitions for artist-run spaces, university galleries, commercial galleries and museums such as Bellevue Art Museum, Mississippi Museum of Art, Santa Monica Museum of Art, Armory Center for the Arts, SPACES and the Abington Art Center.
http://www.contemporary.org

SILLE STORIHLE is a visual artist, and holds a Bachelor degree from the Trondheim Academy of Fine Arts and a Master degree from the School of Critical Studies at California Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles. Her main interest is the narration of histories – looking for new ways to narrate what has already been told. Storihle was the first resident at INCA in Detroit, a residency program established by Aeron Bergman and Alejandra Salinas. She wrote the text Anecdote from Detroit as a response to her five-week stay in the city.

Kerstin Niemann would like to extend her gratitude to those who shared, questioned and supported us in bringing this project to life. She would like to especially thank the artists, makers, thinkers, writers and people of the city of Detroit, Baltimore and Hamburg. Special thanks to: Danielle Aubert.

PRODUCTION NOTE

This publication was printed on paper aquired from a high-volume paper recycler in downtown Detroit. The interior pages are Cougar Antique 20 lb uncoated text stock, manufactured by Domtar, a company headquartered in Canada. This particular paper may have been manufactured at a mill in Arkansas or Kentucky. The cover is Curious Collection 100 lb Extra White cover stock, which is made by a division of the French company ArjoWiggins.

The paper was purchased as large press sheets. These were cut down over the course of two days with the help of Bryan Baker at Stukenborg Press, a letterpress shop situated in the Ponyride building in Detroit's Corktown neighborhood. For the initial cuts of the text stock we used a large hand lever paper cutter made by Chandler & Price, a press and paper cutter manufacturer that existed in Cleveland from 1881 to 1964. The sheets were cut down further on a smaller, lever-operated Challenge Pony Cutter, a machine made by the Challenge Machinery Co. which was founded in 1887 in Grand Haven, Michigan. Both of the lever paper cutters could safely be termed "vintage", or even "antique", machines that date from the early part of the 20th century.

The Curious Collection cover stock, which was too big to fit in either of the Stukenborg paper cutters, was trimmed on an automated hydraulic Challenge Champion paper cutter across the hall, at the Hernandez Blueprinting Services company. The Champion cutter was first introduced in 1960. This particular machine was probably made at the Challenge factory that existed in Grand Haven until 2002, when the company moved its headquarters to Norton Shores, Michigan.

The cut sheets were delivered to Heath Press in Royal Oak, Michigan, a company that specializes in digital printing. The covers and interior pages were printed on a Xerox Nuvera 120 EA Production System, a machine that was likely manufactured at the Xerox factory in Webster, New York. It is possible that parts for this machine were supplied through a company called Flextronics, a Singaporean "global electronics manufacturing services company" that Xerox has been outsourcing to since 2001.

After the covers were printed, they were returned to Stukenborg Press, where they were overprinted on a Challenge proof press with marks made by the spacing "furniture", pieces of material normally used in letterpress printing to pack around lines of type in order to keep them from shifting. The pieces were acquired, used, by Bryan Baker in Chickopee, Massachussetts. It's not clear where they came from before that. The Challenge proof press may have been manufactured in the 1950s.

The final printed covers were then brought back to Heath Press, where the text and cover sheets were folded, bound and trimmed on a Duplo 500 Booklet Maker. The Duplo company was founded in Japan in 1951. Its tag line is, "From print to documents." The Duplo 500 was probably manufactured some time within the last 10 years, possibly at one of Duplo's three factories in Japan.

—Danielle Aubert
Detroit, 2012