
RED HOOK JOURNAL

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Notes from the Editor: Spring 2012

Tirdad Zolghadr

Maybe it's just me. I might be spending too much time in Upstate New York. But this issue of Red Hook does seem to reflect, in various ways, a particular discussion unfolding deep within CCS, where questions of accountability have been slowly rising to the fore: accountability among curators, institutions, and among discourses too. The post-Szeemann rhetoric of maverick, anti-disciplinary curating was a productive type of hubris when CCS was founded in 1990. It spawned a still prevailing disdain for checks and balances, and for tropes of self-effacing agnosia and indeterminacy, of nooks and crannies and level playing fields, of personal excitement and street-smart intuition.

I admit that in terms of positioning, to this day I've hardly done any better. At many moments in the curatorial process, working criteria are barely transparent to the curators themselves. At said moments, we even get some decent work done. But having been around for some twelve, thirteen years, I'm beginning to wonder why no one's getting bored with all the swishing about. To state the obvious, the much-lamented commercialization, political tokenism, and intellectual somnolence of our mainstream venues will not recede with ever more quirky inclusiveness. Nor will the myriad abuses of power, micro and macro, recede, among curators both mainstream and underground.

It all seems a high price to pay for a little hubris back in the nineties. And CCS is increasingly marked by a perplexity as to whence and whither, and as to the baby and the bathwater. No one is advocating an unadulterated return to raging commandments and conservative canons, yet a push for more transparently formulated positions and priorities, stakes and responsibilities—even broadly defined—seems an invigorating idea to many.

The inaugural issue of Red Hook has already raised similar questions, most obviously in contributions by [Suhail Malik](#) and [Bruce Hainley](#), in discussions of e-flux-as-artwork, and in CCS director [Johanna Burton](#)'s essay. This time around, the spirit of answerability rears its outlandish head in [Burton's](#) present contribution on the challenges of curatorial education, and also in [Danna Vajda's](#) take on our [Artists on Curators](#) column, in [Lauren Cornell's](#) take on our [Online Platforms](#) column, and in [Vincent Bonin's](#) take on institutional critique à la canadienne. Not to mention [Dieter Roelstraete's](#) stirring condemnation of a growing epidemic of nondescriptive writing. Whether or not one agrees with his warning—and this editor has his reservations (not only do such writers actually represent a wide range of agendas, but also their

numbers are minuscule)—Roelstraete brilliantly discusses the implications of said phenomenon for intricate questions of judgment and quality.

Kaelen Wilson-Goldie addresses curators who don't curate, from the perspective of a writer working in Beirut, Cairo, and Istanbul. The rhetoric here is of a similarly anti-institutional ilk as elsewhere. But Wilson-Goldie describes a setting in which curators walk the talk, forfeiting traditional prerogatives for the sake of a more dexterous response to infrastructural deficiencies. Among the curators she refers to, Vasif Kortun is the onetime doyen of what is now the CCS Bard Hessel Museum and the recent founder of the massive SALT venue in Istanbul. Vasif "I made Istanbul" Kortun has now replaced his once refreshing swagger with a more timely, "post-curatorial" position. And again this editor is squeamish, for one needs to maintain a particular kind of authority to defer to this particular kind of post-authorship, but this editor grants his writers the benefit of the doubt, always.

Moreover, in the 3 Texts 1 Artwork series, covered by Jennifer Allen, Philip Ursprung, and CCS alumna Wendy Vogel, questions of liability and power play are obviously decisive, given that the work in question is Phil Collins's *you'll never work in this town again* (2004–ongoing). Combining the civility of satire with the barbarity of snuff, Collins has been photographing obliging curators and other art professionals immediately after slapping them brutally around the face. 3 Texts 1 Artwork focuses on work that subsists as infrastructure, rumor, or discourse, and although Collins's piece also circulates as a series of portraits, we've favored an ekphrasist take on the work's existence as anecdotal hearsay and viral schadenfreude.

Meanwhile, Trude Iversen examines the history of artist unions in Norway. In conversations here in New York, particularly in the shadow of the Arts & Labor offshoot of the Occupy movement, Norway has been referred to as a tantalizing model for collective action for artists. Iversen, based in the heart of mythical Oslo, interweaves her history of these alluring political exotica with the ongoing challenges of government co-optation.

Second Thoughts, a column in which regrets are expressed over previously published material, is covered in this issue by Joerg Heiser. And, not unlike the recent artist commission by Katya Sander, Falke Pisano, in her research for the ongoing project *Body in Crisis*, plays on intrinsic tensions between language and image, using a selection of found material including gifs and sound. In this issue, a curator has contributed in a form beyond the textual: Stuart Comer was invited to draw on the specific potentials of an online journal while responding to the notion of "paper curating," a term coined by CCS Curatorial Associate Nathan Lee.

As you may have noticed, we've decided to stagger the content of this issue over time—links will go live as content is uploaded—in order to accommodate a broader range of possible engagements, and to make the most of our structural potentials as an online platform. Thus Comer, Cornell, and Pisano will complete their contributions over the summer months, gradually overlapping with material once planned for a third Red Hook issue but now already embedded within a more extravagant timeline. The latter contributions will include a commission by artist duo Arlen Austin and Jason Boughton (aka H.E.N.S.), Nathan Lee's investigation of what paper curating harbors as both term and temperament, and a collaboration with Suhail Malik that addresses the strongly feminized gender ratios among curatorial programs worldwide.

I would like to end with my heartfelt thanks to coeditor and CCS alumna Leora Morinis, who is leaving Red Hook after turning this issue into a far more multifaceted, intelligent matter than it ever could have been without her.

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