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# RED HOOK JOURNAL

Press Releases

## Notes From The Editor: Fall 2011

Tirdad Zolghadr

“No one visits the grave of a curator.” Tom Eccles has a way of leaping to the point. This observation by the executive director of CCS Bard is unlikely to decorate the institution’s doorways anytime soon, but for this inaugural issue of our online journal, there’s something to be said for his humbling, prophetic thunder. It’s no surprise that we hear so many calls for putting curators back in their place, whether it’s six feet under or deep within the technocratic corridors of power. And it’s endearing to see one illustrious curator after another point to himself and proclaim, “curatorial training, well, I never had such a thing,” when they’re excellent cases in point. As argued in this journal by [Johanna Burton](#), director of the CCS graduate program, and by [Suhail Malik](#) of Goldsmiths, University of London, the field’s current lack of criteria isn’t doing anyone, least of all the art, any favors. The intuitive chanciness that defines much of curatorial practice comes not from “overreaching” beyond a natural “place,” but precisely from the lack of such a place; Red Hook’s plea for specificity is not meant to produce boundaries, let alone police them, but rather to discuss intelligent criteria through which curators can be held accountable by artists, audiences, and their own colleagues.



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Instead of a perky barrage of Good Points on a timely topic, Red Hook addresses key preoccupations of its host institution, necromantic and otherwise. Over time, this journal will raise questions of curatorial specificity in an educational context. What are the terminologies, exhibition histories, political stakes,

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aesthetic biases, professional mythicizing and self-mythicizing that create the common denominators? And how can this best be addressed without forging a new discipline, in keeping with the spirit of a field that is as much in transition today as it was forty years ago. In other words, this journal eschews the master tropes of curatorial folklore—group exhibitions, personal profiles, cosmopolitan excitement—in favor of a conversation that is both more rudimentary and, dare I say, more “urgent.”

Curatorial education aside, a second moving target here, one that is at least as mystifying, perhaps even more so, is the new field of online publishing. This is where you get an even clearer sense of the privilege and vertigo of inhabiting a historical threshold, leading to a constant suspicion that you’re missing key conversations unfolding concurrently all around you, coupled with yet another nagging suspicion, that much of your eagerness and anxiety will be considered quaint only a few years from now.



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Online, even an essay’s word count is a different question. Some insist that for want of electronic ink, a Red Hook essay needs to be brutally short, or that due to the overall dynamics of the online attention economy, any issue of the journal should be readable in a single sitting. Another important bullet point is the relationship between virtual visual material and its discursive pendants.

In “[being post internet](#)” Artie Vierkant, an artist based in San Diego, points to the generation of “conceptualism,” which, he argues, “assured its own legacy by the overwhelming volume of language

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produced within and around it at a time when summary-through-language was the easiest means of disseminating an object.” Vierkant optimistically insists that we’re no longer reliant on language to the same extent. Although this journal will certainly attempt to do justice to opportunities for revisiting traditional hierarchies between image and text, it will be careful not to imply that language is diminishing in comparative importance, or that the online sphere can heal old wounds. On the contrary, the idea is to highlight and complicate an enduring hegemony in the hermeneutic food chain of online circulation.

That said, there are indeed ways—perhaps what Vierkant has been hinting at all along—of revisiting the customary division of labor, ways to hint at new prospects from within the old, musty affinities. When Berlin-based artist Katya Sander was invited to partake in this issue in any way she saw fit, the instrumentalization of images in a publication context—and the lack of online signposts that traditionally steer this kind of process—became a cornerstone of the project “Hard Drive,” an introduction to which can be found [here](#).



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Beyond the attention spans and the text-image divide, another challenge for online publications is the relationship to place. In his editorial statement for East of Borneo, artist [Thomas Lawson](#), also coeditor of the journal *Afterall*, framed his project as a deeply local affair, reflecting the vagaries of Los Angeles in particular, despite or precisely because of the publication’s existence exclusively online. Red Hook pursues a similarly counterintuitive premise, strenuously emphasizing the journal’s relationship to its mother ship by addressing issues painfully close to home, and by engaging Bard faculty and CCS

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alumni/ae as writers, and current students as editorial partners. This is a key aspect of Red Hook that we hope to develop in future issues.

To further address these matters of online specificity, the journal is introducing the column Online Platforms, initiated in this issue by CCS alumna Claire Barliant, who describes the far-reaching implications of the Metropolitan Museum's new website. Ed Halter, visiting faculty in Bard's Film and Electronic Arts Program, conveys a historical sense of the www by means of the surprising story of the elusive Cosineve, a very early example of online cult authorship, long before the days of youtube and myspace.



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Over a soggy pasta primavera at the Bard faculty dining room, Halter also helped pin down the starting point for Red Hook’s column on offline prose, insisting that we immediately tackle none other than the most harrowing arena of critical writing, the catalogue essay. I quickly agreed, and immediately entrusted that superbly challenging and deeply ungrateful endeavor to LA-based poet and writer [Bruce Hainley](#). Elsewhere the column [Second Thoughts](#) addresses the act of writing in and of itself, focusing on the deathlike finality with which a text is released into the world, impossible ever to be revisited. As explained by London-based curator Tom Morton, once curatorial writing is out there, it might as well be dead and gone. No one visits the grave of a text, except in [Second Thoughts](#), where writers and curators may visit the ghosts of publications past, without shame or melancholy. The [Artists on Curators](#) column, yet another modest attempt to reverse the usual premises of critical writing, is kicked off by LA-based artist Meg Cranston.

As for “Three Essays One Artwork,” pinning down the first iteration of such a series is not an uncomplicated task, but the choice of e-flux seems a reasonable one, more or less. e-flux is too close a neighbor to ignore, both in terms of comparable interests in discourse, infrastructure, and pedagogy, and of the sheer influence it exerts in the New York vicinity and far beyond. The story is well known: what began with four artists announcing an art event via email in 1999 soon morphed into the most influential promotional tool in contemporary art, and is now an expanded collective operation initiating events and projects in New York and internationally, including a journal that is an important precedent for Red Hook.



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e-flux sparks debates that are heated and polarized, but always emphatically off the record, mysteriously so; the commissions in this issue are an attempt to move out of the barrooms into the glaring light of day. To some, e-flux represents the ultimate model of artistic emancipation; to others, a culmination of art-as-business. (“e-flux is a cry for help,” purred longtime compagnon de route Sylvère Lothringer,

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smilingly, into a microphone, at a springtime Bard event.) For myself, my work with the extended e-flux universe in Berlin, 2006–2007, in the context of the unitednationsplaza, was as bewilderingly productive as anything a writer/curator could possibly wish for, and I gladly confess to being a critical but persistent e-flux aficionado ever since.

From among the artists currently involved in e-flux, Anton Vidokle is the most outspoken in terms of conceptually framing the project. Vidokle has compellingly insisted on his own role as an artist—not an organizer—with respect to e-flux, challenging the audience to consider the project an artwork in its own right. This latter proposition I find most cogent. It would be easy to see the enterprise as an artist-run space or a business, yet e-flux addresses matters of authorship, autonomy, activism, use-value, distribution, and even sociality and atmosphere through a multifarious procedure that is not identical to the operations of your standard venue or commercial firm. In this issue, e-flux is discussed, in dramatically different ways, by San Sebastian–based critic Peio Aguirre, Thomas Lawson, and CCS alumna Sarah Demeuse.

Finally, each edition of Red Hook will feature a translation from the persistent terra incognita of the non-anglophone into the art field's prevailing lingua franca. This issue includes a translation of Diedrich Diederichsen's "Living in the Loop." The text is a shortened version of the first chapter of *Eigenblutdoping* (KiWi, Cologne 2008), which translates as "self-blood doping" and refers to the practice of athletes using transfusions of their own blood to enhance its oxygen content. Diederichsen's text not only addresses the inflated promises of higher education, but also the tropography of progress and success, repetition and reflexivity. As a curatorial strategy, the latter, though a political imperative in my opinion, often runs the risk of imploding into institutional window dressing or unadulterated narcissism, and needs constant (sanguine) revision to remain relevant.



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The journal's very name, Red Hook, signals an appetite for a bare-bones reflexivity that is as blunt as it is uncomplicated. Naming the journal after an upstate town, the closest municipality to the Bard College campus, softly echoes the widespread cliché of CCS students reading books in the woods—something we have in common with the likes of Jane Austen, Heidegger, and the Unabomber. But, like them, we do other things too.

I'd like to end by extending my heartfelt thanks to the CCS students, beginning with Orit Gat and Amy Zion for their superb editorial diligence, Rachel Cook and Agatha Wara for their helpful advice on the vagaries of the online and other matters, and also Janine Armin, Suzy Halajian, and Jenny Jaskey for their thoughtful input. I also wish to thank the participants in the 2010 Criticism & Curating seminar who helped define and formulate some indispensable groundwork for this journal: Nova Benway, Karin Campbell, Kelly Kivland, Nathan Lee, Courtney Malick, Julia Paoli, Anastasia Rygle and Clark Solack.

Finally, I thank my colleagues, including Johanna Burton and Ann Butler for their encouraging feedback and critical support, and especially Tom Eccles for both laying the groundwork for this journal and setting the ball in motion. Avanti.

**Tirdad Zolghadr is a writer and curator who teaches at CCS. His second novel, Plot, is published by Sternberg Press.**

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<http://www.bard.edu/ccs/redhook/notes-from-the-editor/>

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