

The Artist as Author?

Lois Richard

Introduction

In 2015, I remember asking a pavement worker if he would assimilate a stone I had crafted into the pavement which he was reconstructing. He did it with pleasure. Then, out of the blue, I had the notion to ask other nearby labourers to retrieve my floating collage out of the river with their excavator. The experiment was a success, a both meditative and suspenseful short film.

From then on I mainly made works in collaboration, whether with strangers or confidantes. In my most recent work, I asked the composer, singer and conductor Georgi Sztojanov to source from a textual excerpt by Roland Barthes. From here, Sztojanov created a sound score, taking both the role of the conductor and performer simultaneously. I recorded his abstracted action, which was later shown in an installation entitled *The Death of the Author*, in reference to Barthes' text.

Roland Barthes - The Death of the Author

In his story Sarrasine, Balzac, speaking of a castrato disguised as a woman, writes this sentence: "It was Woman, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive fears, her unprovoked bravado, her daring and her delicious delicacy of feeling" Who is speaking in this way? Is it the story's hero, concerned to ignore the castrato concealed beneath the woman? Is it the man Balzac, endowed by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it the author Balzac, professing certain "literary" ideas of femininity? Is it universal wisdom? or romantic psychology? It will always be impossible to know, for the good reason that all writing is itself this special voice, consisting of several indiscernible voices, and that literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes.

Probably this has always been the case: once an action is recounted, for intransitive ends, and no longer in order to act directly upon reality - that is, finally external to any function but the very exercise of the symbol - this disjunction occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters his own death, writing begins. Nevertheless, the feeling about this phenomenon has been variable; in primitive societies, narrative is never undertaken by a person, but by a mediator, shaman or speaker, whose "performance" may be admired (that is, his mastery of the narrative code), but not his "genius" The author is a modern figure, produced no doubt by our society insofar as, at the end of the middle ages, with

English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, or, to put it more nobly, of the "human person" Hence it is logical that with regard to literature it should be positivism, resume and the result of capitalist ideology, which has accorded the greatest importance to the author's "person" The author still rules in manuals of literary history, in biographies of writers, in magazine interviews, and even in the awareness of literary men, anxious to unite, by their private journals, their person and their work; the image of literature to be found in contemporary culture is tyrannically centered on the author, his person, his history, his tastes, his passions; criticism still consists, most of the time, in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of the man

Baudelaire, Van Gogh's work his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice: the explanation of the work is always sought in the man who has produced it, as if, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, it was always finally the voice of one and the same person, the author, which delivered his "confidence."

Though the Author's empire is still very powerful (recent criticism has often merely consolidated it), it is evident that for a long time now certain writers have attempted to topple it. In France, Mallarme was doubtless the first to see and foresee in its full extent the necessity of substituting language itself for the man who hitherto was supposed to own it; for Mallarme, as for us, it is language which speaks, not the author: to write is to reach, through a preexisting impersonality - never to be

confused with the castrating objectivity of the realistic novelist - that point where language alone acts, "performs," and not "oneself": Mallarme's entire poetics consists in suppressing the author for the sake of the writing (which is, as we shall see, to restore the status of the reader.) Valery, encumbered with a psychology of the Self, greatly edulcorated Mallarme's theory, but, turning in a preference for classicism to the lessons of rhetoric, he unceasingly questioned and mocked the Author, emphasized the linguistic and almost "chance" nature of his activity, and throughout his prose works championed the essentially verbal condition of literature, in the face of which any recourse to the writer's inferiority seemed to him pure superstition. It is clear that Proust himself, despite the apparent psychological character of what is called his analyses, undertook the responsibility of inexorably blurring, by an extreme subtilization, the relation of the writer and his characters: by making the narrator not the person who has seen or felt, nor even the person who writes, but the person who will write (the young man of the novel - but, in fact, how old is he, and who is he? - wants to write but cannot, and the novel ends when at last the writing becomes possible), Proust has given modern writing its epic: by a radical reversal, instead of putting his life into his novel, as we say so often, he makes his very life into a work for which his own book was in a sense the model, so that it is quite obvious to us that it is not Charlus who imitates Montesquieu, but that Montesquieu in his anecdotal, historical

reality is merely a secondary fragment, derived from Charlus. Surrealism lastly - to remain on the level of this prehistory of modernity - surrealism doubtless could not accord language a sovereign place, since language is a system and since what the movement sought was, romantically, a direct subversion of all codes - an illusory subversion, moreover, for a code cannot be destroyed, it can only be "played with"; but by abruptly violating expected meanings (this was the famous surrealist "jolt"), by entrusting to the hand the responsibility of writing as fast as possible what the head itself ignores (this was automatic writing), by accepting the principle and the experience of a collective writing, surrealism helped secularize the image of the Author. Finally, outside of literature itself (actually, these distinctions are being superseded), linguistics has just furnished the destruction of the Author with a precious analytic instrument by showing that utterance in its entirety is a void process, which functions perfectly without requiring to be filled by the person of the interlocutors: linguistically, the author is never anything more than the man who writes, just as I is no more than the man who says I: language knows a "subject," not a "person," and this subject, void outside of the very utterance which defines it, suffices to make language "work," that is, to exhaust it.

The absence of the Author (with Brecht, we might speak here of a real "alienation:" the Author diminishing like a tiny figure at the far end of the literary stage) is not only a historical fact or an act of writing: it utterly transforms the modern text (or - what is the same thing - the text is henceforth written and read so that in it, on every level, the Author absents himself). Time, first of all, is no longer the same. The Author, when we believe in him, is always conceived as the past of his own book: the book and the author take their places of their own accord on the same line, cast as a before and an after: the Author is

supposed to feed the book – that is, he pre-exists it, thinks, suffers, lives for it; he maintains with his work the same relation of antecedence a father maintains with his child. Quite the contrary, the modern writer (scriptor) is born simultaneously with his text; he is in no way supplied with a being which precedes or transcends his writing, he is in no way the subject of which his book is the predicate; there is no other time than that of the utterance, and every text is eternally written here and now. This is because (or: it follows that) to write can no longer designate an operation of

recording, of observing, of representing, of “painting” (as the Classic writers put it), but rather what the linguisticians, following the vocabulary of the Oxford school, call a performative, a rare verbal form (exclusively given to the first person and to the present), in which utterance has no other content than the act by which it is uttered: something like the / Command of kings or the I Sing of the early bards; the modern writer, having buried the Author, can therefore no longer believe, according to the “pathos” of his predecessors, that his hand is too slow for his thought or his passion, and that in consequence, making a law out of necessity, he must accentuate this gap and endlessly “elaborate” his form; for him, on the contrary, his hand, detached from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin – or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, that is, the very thing which ceaselessly questions any origin.

We know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture. Like Bouvard and Pecuchet, those eternal copyists, both sublime and comical and whose profound absurdity precisely designates the truth of writing, the writer can only imitate a gesture forever anterior, never original; his only power is to combine the different kinds of writing, to oppose some by others, so as never to sustain himself by just one of them; if he wants to express himself, at least he should know that the internal “thing” he claims to “translate” is itself only a readymade dictionary whose words can be explained (defined) only by other words, and so on ad infinitum: an experience which occurred in an exemplary fashion to the young De Quincey, so gifted in Greek that in order to translate into that dead language certain absolutely modern ideas and images, Baudelaire tells us, “he created for it a standing dictionary much more complex and extensive than the one which results from the vulgar patience of purely literary themes” (Paradis Artificiels). succeeding the Author, the writer no longer contains within himself passions, humors, sentiments, impressions, but that enormous dictionary, from which he derives a writing which can know no end or halt: life can only imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, a lost, infinitely remote imitation.

Once the Author is gone, the claim to “decipher” a text becomes quite useless. To give an Author to a text is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification, to close the writing. This conception perfectly suits criticism, which can then take as its major task the discovery of the Au-

thor (or his hypostases: society, history, the psyche, freedom) beneath the work: once the Author is discovered, the text is “explained:” the critic has conquered; hence it is scarcely surprising not only that, historically, the reign of the Author should also have been that of the Critic, but that criticism (even “new criticism”) should be overthrown along with the Author. In a multiple writing, indeed, everything is to be distinguished, but nothing deciphered; structure can be followed, “threaded” (like a stocking that has run) in all its recurrences and all its stages, but there is no underlying ground; the space of the writing is to be traversed, not penetrated: writing ceaselessly posits meaning but always in order to evaporate it: it proceeds to a systematic exemption of meaning. Thus literature (it would be better, henceforth, to say writing), by refusing to assign to the text (and to the world as text) a “secret:” that is, an ultimate meaning, liberates an activity which we might call counter-theological, properly revolutionary, for to refuse to arrest meaning is finally to refuse God and his hypostases, reason, science, the law.

Let us return to Balzac’s sentence: no one (that is, no “person”) utters it: its source, its voice is not to be located; and yet it is perfectly read; this is because the true locus of writing is reading. Another very specific example can make this understood: recent investigations (J. P. Vernant) have shed light upon the constitutively ambiguous nature of Greek tragedy, the text of which is woven with words that have double meanings, each character understanding them unilaterally (this perpetual misunderstanding is precisely what is meant by “the tragic”); yet there is someone who understands each word in its duplicity, and understands further, one might say, the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him: this someone is precisely the reader (or here the spectator). In this way is revealed the whole being of writing: a text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, as we have hitherto said it was, but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination; but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted. This is why it is absurd to hear the new writing condemned in the name of a humanism which hypocritically appoints itself the champion of the reader’s rights. The reader has never been the concern of classical criticism; for it, there is no other man in literature but the one who writes. We are now beginning to be the dupes no longer of such antiphrases, by which our society proudly champions precisely what it dismisses, ignores, smotheres or destroys; we know that to restore to writing its future, we must reverse its myth: the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author.

LANGUAGE
- for solo voice & conductor -
Georgi Sztojanov

Moderato
mp
Linguistically the author is nevermore the instance writing,

Andante
p
just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I;

Allegretto
mp
Language knows a 'subject' not a 'person'

Con moto
mf
poco accel
ff
and this subject, empty outside of the enunciation which defines it,

Poco sostenuto
f
pp
suffices to make language 'hold to-ge-ther

Moderato
mf
pp
Largo
mp
suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it.

- Roland Barthes: The Death of the Author

The musical score of a part of the essay *The Death of the Author* by Roland Barthes, made by Georgi Sztojanov.



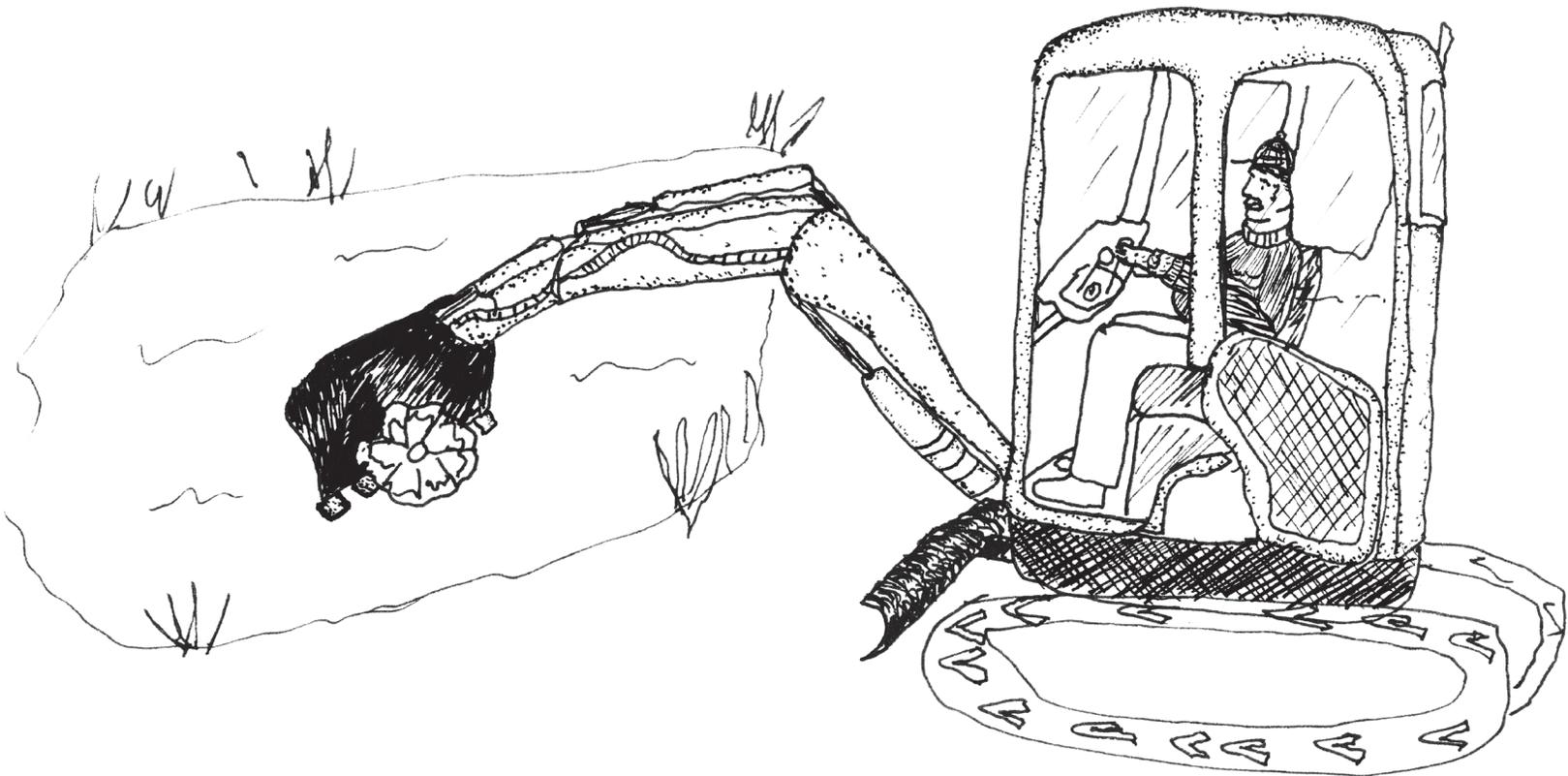
Documentation of installation *The Death of the Author*, 2016, The Hague.

As one may understand, I could not have possibly created these scenes on my own, in my isolated studio. As part of my thesis, I wish to examine artists who have taken a similar approach to group work as myself, or who consciously center their work around the theme of collaboration. As another layer, throughout the process of writing I soon decided to engage with this thesis as a collaborator, herself.

Is the originator of the idea, necessarily, the author of the work, even if he or she does not actually manufacture it? Or, should those who produce the work, and possibly alter it through this process, also be granted authorship?

Contents

- 19 Oh Thesis,
- 20 Types of Collaboration in
the Artistic Practice
- 29 'Authorship' According to Roland
Barthes/Questioning Authorship
- 37 Francis Alÿs and Sophie Calle
- 42 Let's have a Closer Look at
Francis Alÿs
- 50 And a Closer Look
to Sophie Calle
- 60 Conclusion
- 66 Bibliography



Oh Thesis,

I want to collaborate in this text with you ...
I come to you for help and support. Can
we possibly work together?

Simply put, if we should succeed in cooperating, dear Thesis, we have achieved something I could not have done on my own.

If I merely provide the content and structure to which you have to mold, will you please write yourself?

Do we have a deal?

To continue, let us examine what collaboration entails, through the lens of Francis Alÿs and Sophie Calle's work. Generally, do these two artists generate their work within an engaged field of human interaction and its social context, as opposed to working within an enclosed, autonomous space?¹

Types of Collaboration in the Artistic Practice

Collaboration comes in many forms and is, indeed, inextricable from the arts. For evidence of this, we can examine working methods as far back as the Baroque era, as well as within the Surrealists' group experiments, Constructivists' theatre, Fluxus games and Andy Warhol's pseudo-industrial *Factory*.²

As is seen within these aforementioned artistic movements, there are many different ways of going about organising collaboration. To examine two opposite extremes, within any given collaboration, artists hypothetically surrender total control. If they are willing to engage in a dialogue, artists therefore take a risk by allowing someone else to shape the end result. On the other hand, "collaboration" without much dialogue can also occur. For instance, an artist might provide instructions for the others to follow, without much personal input nor freedom toward shaping the work. As for

example Andy Warhol's Factory, there was certainly a case of a collective dialogue underlying in the process, of making the works, but it was all eclipsed behind the name of Andy Warhol.

"According to art historian/critic and curator Christain Kravagna there are four different methods seen in contemporary art, with an interest in human interaction: working with others, interactive activities, collective action, and participatory practice."³

According to Maria Lind,

"Collaboration takes place both on the level of the author, with the formulation of the idea, and also in the realisation of the work. The idea is developed together with others who are awarded the same status as the author and who also all participate in the execution of the project" (Lind, pag. 23).

In this quote, Lind addresses a collaboration in which the contributors are awarded the same status as author, an occurrence I have experienced to be less common. An artist who would fall under this umbrella

is the sculptor Richard Deacon (1949). As part of his working methodology, Deacon enters into a variety of contractual arrangements, including splitting sales, cost and risks, paying one-off fees for services and sharing percentages of intellectual property rights.⁴ So, therefore, already in his basic working process he collaborates with others.

Lind extrapolates:

“‘Double’ collaboration is therefore synonymous with Kravagna’s ‘collective action.’ ‘Triple’ collaboration would then refer to the cases where the subject of the work, the theme itself, is collaboration, as for instance, in Neidl Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska’s *Enthusiasm*, 2007, in which they singled out Polish post-war film clubs in factories. The double collaborations seem to be most typical of present-day collaboration, emphasising the working conditions of artists. Another clear division in terms of the varied forms of collaborative work is that which exists between formal and the informal groupings of authors, between the fixed number of members and a common name, and those without any general plan, and who like a flock

of birds, crop up in different formations on different occasions.”⁵

Within formal groups of authors who have a fixed number of members, such as an artistic duo, there seems to be no question of authorship. What they make seems generally accepted as made by a whole entity; there is not really the question of who made what. Take for example the dynamic duos Gilbert & George and Jake & Dinos Chapman, whose authorship is wholly shared.

An example of a collective which aims to be seen as having shared authorship is *Temporary Services*, based in Chicago since 1998. They describe themselves as a group which shares authorship, even though they shift in numbers of participants.

“We develop strategies for harnessing the ideas and energies of people who may have never participated in an art project before, or who may feel excluded from the art community. We mobilise the generosity of many people to produce projects on a scale that none of us could achieve in isolation. We strive towards

aesthetic experiences built upon trust and unlimited experimentation.... Working together in a group gives us both the ability to do multiple projects at once and the flexibility to use each other's experiences to our collective advantage. We like collaboration because of the inherent challenges and incredible possibilities that come from working with others. We utilise each other's skill sets and trust in each other's ideas because we have worked together for so long. ”⁶

To mention the sculptor Richard Deacon again, he writes about the comparison between the artists' workshops from the Renaissance which have been populated by assistants doing the bidding of the master to his own practice, which he describes as different than the Renaissance workshops because to him it's more about finding people who are better at doing something than he is. He is not telling them exactly what to do, on the comparison, the people with whom he collaborates have a lot of influence on how the work is going to end up.⁷

“Collaboration entails contact, confrontation, deliberation and negotiation to a degree which

goes beyond individual work, (and that this produces subjectivity differently.)”⁸

To name an example of these aforementioned aspects; could be the artist Artur Zmijewski's (Warschau, 1966) with the work *Them*, 2007, in which he set up a series of painting workshops for four different groups in Warsaw: ladies from the Catholic Church, Young Socialists, Young Jews, and Polish Nationalists. Each group produced a symbolic depiction of its values, which were printed onto T-shirts worn by each member of the group in subsequent workshops. Zmijewski then encouraged each group to respond to each others' paintings, altering and amending the images as they saw fit. Zmijewski lets us view the human insecurities, its weakness, fears, doubts and shame. In the climax of the film Zmijewski draws out the game of action and reaction, the constant change and delete of each others painted and drawn symbols culminated in a fierce confrontation, drawings were destroyed, thrown out of the window or even burned

completely.

Upon reflection, artists might also choose to collaborate in order to produce a work without true closure. In this way, the work can still exist within the participants and their stories of the experience. Further, maybe the collaborator(s) want to shine light on the work again by presenting it in another way within their profession. With a highly tangible work such as a painting, (not to underestimate a painting's value), that painting's life ends, in some ways, at the moment of purchase. From then on, it belongs to the owner, with a destiny of perhaps being stored in a museum's archive or somebody's private collection, easily forgotten. So to speak, there are more possibilities for a collaborative work to be kept actively alive, without gaining dust.

“It is only in the last twenty years that performance art has become ‘industrialised’, and this shift - from festival to museum space, mobilising large numbers of performers, unionised modes of remuneration, and ever large audiences - means that contemporary art increasingly exists in a sphere of collaboration akin to theatre and

dance, even while it retains art's valorisation of individual authorship. (There is no serious market, for example, for signed photographs of theatrical productions.)”⁹

For now we could say that artists collaborate among other things because they can achieve something which simply isn't possible achieving on their own, due to political reasons, because the outcome of the work can become more spontaneous, as a counter-reaction to the idea of the artist as a lone genius, to examine the construction of collective identity and the extent to which people always exceed these categories, to make their art more accessible for people of all classes or to let the spectator have a sense of reality, question it and not knowing for sure whether it's art or not.¹⁰

- 1 This question is based upon Nicolas Bourriauds 'Relational Aesthetics', 1998.
- 2 Lind, Maria, 'Taking the Matter into Common Hands': On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices, Black Dog Publishing, 2007.
- 3 Lind, Maria, 'Taking the Matter into Common Hands': On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices, Black Dog Publishing, 2007.
- 4 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/jan/31/sculptor-richard-deacon-tate-britain>
- 5 Lind, Maria, 'Taking the Matter into Common Hands': On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices, Black Dog Publishing, 2007.
- 6 <http://temporaryservices.org/served/>
- 7 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/jan/31/sculptor-richard-deacon-tate-britain>
- 8 Bishop, Claire, 'Artificial Hells', chapter Delegated Performance Pag. 232, Verso, 2012.
- 9 Bishop, Claire, 'Artificial Hells', chapter Delegated Performance Pag. 232, Verso, 2012.
- 10 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7L1s_GWn3o / Tania Bruguera on 'La Monnaie Vivante' Tate Modern, 2008.

'Authorship' according to Roland Barthes/Questioning Authorship

To return again to the essay of Barthes mentioned in the introduction, what does authorship mean according to him, and do we agree upon that?

“Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I: language knows a ‘subject’, not a ‘person’, and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language ‘hold together’, suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it.”

– Roland Barthes

In 1968 the French post-structuralist literary critic wrote the essay *La mort de l’Auteur, or The Death of the Author*. In this work he claimed that it is not the au-

thor that should be giving the meaning of the text, rather than the reader. The meaning of the text is not limited to the author's intent. The Author, capitalised and there by emphasised in Barthes' essay above the reader, can be understood as a communicator, a poet or a shaman, one who is conduit of some truth from God or Nature. This contrasts the idea of author as a lonesome genius who gives birth to the text. Barthes later on replaces, in the essay, the term Author for scriptor. The *scriptor* can be read more as simultaneous with the text as if he/she were a character him/ herself. Barthes described, as an example, the French poet Mallarmé, 1842,

“For Mallarme, as for us, it is language which speaks, not the author: to write is to reach, through a preexisting impersonality – never to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realistic novelist – that point where language alone acts, “performs,” and not “oneself”: Mallarme's entire poetics consists in suppressing the author for the sake of the writing (which

is, as we shall see, to restore the status of the reader.)”¹¹

According to Barthes, the meaning of the text only arises through the reader's experience of it, rather than the authority of the author which creates only one interpretation for the text. If the authors 'death' has been declared, the reader is free to interpret the text.

“The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not its origin but in its destination.”¹²

Barthes' essay is specifically concerned with literature, but it can certainly also apply to contemporary art. Since, to me, if the artist's ego is exaggeratedly thrust upon me, it will definitely influence my perception of the work. Whereas on the other hand, if I am uninformed, I can digest the piece in a broader way, focusing more on the work itself than on the artist's identity. Still, I am not saying that I think the artist

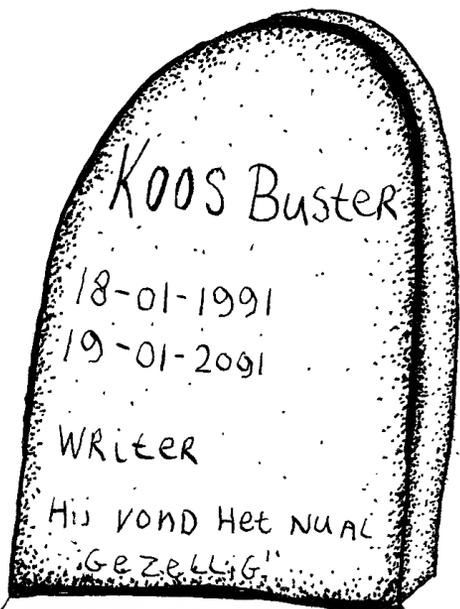
behind a work should reside in the background and let the spectators decide the work's intent. However, an overdeveloped artist's ego can become a deterrent in viewing the work itself. In this case, perhaps, it is the ego that creates the work, rather than the subconscious drive.

“Who speaks (in the narrative) is not who writes (in real life) and who writes is not who is.”

— Roland Barthes.

11 Barthes, Roland, 'The Death of the Author', American journal Aspen, no. 5-6 in 1967.

12 Barthes, Roland, 'The Death of the Author', American journal Aspen, no. 5-6 in 1967.



ROLAND BARTELS

Francis Alÿs and Sophie Calle

Keeping in mind Barthes's vision of an author as a medium, I will examine, the works of Francis Alÿs and Sophie Calle. Can they serve as an example of the artist who puts themselves in the background? What's more, can they be seen as a medium sourcing the subconscious, rather than a lone genius creating from the sheer powers of his/her imagination, labelling the work as purely his/her own?

One finger
stretches out in
the open landscape
two fingers
stretching out
three fingers
pointing out the
sand dune

a search,
a conversation,
a conviction,
a grain of sand,
a lot of grains of sand,
a lot of people,
with shovels,
hard work,
to eventually,
not seeing result,
of moving 10 centimeters,
of a sand dune in Lima, Peru.
Maximum effort for the minimum result.

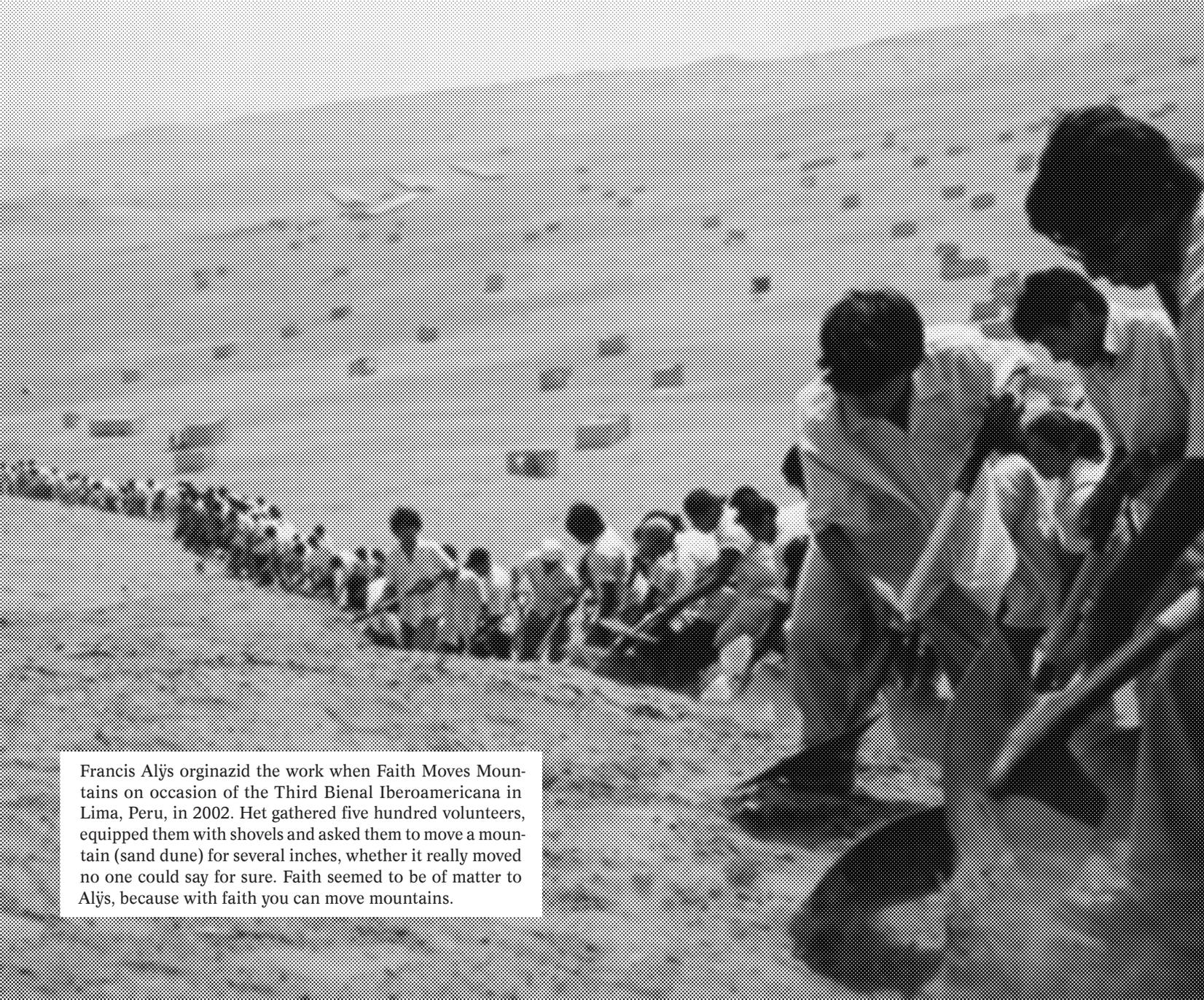
*

Sometimes we make nothing
sometimes we make everything
sometimes we make nothing but everything
Sometimes we make everything but nothing

*

Artist and Performer
Artist as creator
Artist as a binding factor
artist as entertainer
Artist as a pretty picture
Artist who are you?

— Lois Richard



Francis Alj's organized the work when Faith Moves Mountains on occasion of the Third Bienal Iberoamericana in Lima, Peru, in 2002. He gathered five hundred volunteers, equipped them with shovels and asked them to move a mountain (sand dune) for several inches, whether it really moved no one could say for sure. Faith seemed to be of matter to Alj's, because with faith you can move mountains.

Let's have a Closer look at Francis Aljys

Francis Aljys (1959, Antwerp) is a Belgium born and Mexico based artist, trained as an architect, he has created a diverse body of artwork that explores urbanity, spatial justice, and land-based poetics. Employing a broad range of media from painting to performance, his works examine the tension between politics and poetics, individual action and impotence. Aljys commonly enacts *paseos* – walks that resist the subjection of common space. Aljys reconfigures time to the speed of a stroll. Cyclical repetition and return also inform the character of Aljys' movements and mythology—Aljys contrasts geological and technological time through land-based and social practice that examine individual memory and collective mythology. Aljys frequently engages rumor as a central theme in his practice, disseminating ephemeral, practice-based works through word-of-mouth and storytelling.¹³

In the work *When Faith Moves Mountains*, 2002, the process of preparation occupied a large role in the work. For instance, Aljys had to painstakingly find 500 students willing to join this project, during which they were asked to move a sand dune for about 10 centimeters.¹⁴ Participants stood together around the dune, transporting sand grain after grain. In this way, the process became the work, as there was no visible real result, but a permeating sense of victory, nonetheless.

But is it faith that moved the mountain? And can we, having a closer look at the work, really speak of collaboration? Was there true dialogue between those moving the sand dune and the founder of its action? To what was Aljys referring with his poetic title?

We can posit that at the time of the creation, the anticipated action seemed impossible. However, by having enough faith to relinquish responsibility to the volunteers, the feeling of having conquered the unconquerable was evoked.

To return to the question of authorship: who originated this work? It is clear that Alj's came up with the idea; nevertheless, without all the participants, the action would not have been achieved. This gained knowledge resided not only in the action itself, but lingered into its afterlife in the form of the stories circulated within the local and artistic communities.

One could also wonder, why Alj's chose to carry out this massive action with, ultimately, no result? He could have, for example, abandoned the idea after its manifestation in drawn or painted form. Furthermore, when Alj's visited Lima in October 2000, he noted the desperate political situation which was "calling for an epic response:¹⁵" He effectually staged a social allegory to fit the circumstances, rather than producing a merely visual response. The work balances an expression of social mobilisation and the abuse of power, while also resisting the idea of modernisation. As Alj's states, "It dramatises a principle of 'Maximum Effort, Minimal Result' that typifies many Latin American

modernisation schemes, yet it was also a monumental achievement made by communal co-operation."

When Faith Moves Mountains could be taken as an example of a work in which the author pulls himself back from his own work. To extrapolate further, there is no obvious aspect which refers to Alj's himself as the subject; thus, all the attention is drawn to the event, which will continue as a kind of myth long after the action.

"Only in its repetition and transmission is the work actualised. In this respect, art can never free itself from myth. Indeed, in modern no less than pre-modern societies, art operates precisely within the space of myth. In this sense, myth is not about the veneration of ideals - or pagan religion or political ideology - but rather an active interpretive practice performed by the audience, who must give the work its meaning and its social value "¹⁶

Another work of Alj's in which he, to me, managed to be the medium/author is *Don't Cross the Bridge Before You Get to the River*, 2008. In this work, Alj's staged

a line of children who guided shoe-boats on the ocean in the direction of Morocco (leaving Europe), while a second line left Africa in the direction of Spain. Hypothetically, they would meet each other at the horizon. *Don't Cross the Bridge Before You Get to the River* took place in 2008 in the Strait of Gibraltar separating Europe and Africa. The Strait's geographical context, being just 14 kilometers wide at its narrowest crossing, has made it a place where many people attempt to smuggle their way into Europe from Africa. The rough waves particular to this area, however, have posed serious obstructions for illegal immigrants, many of whom try to cross the strait in makeshift boats.¹⁷ Similarly to *When Faith Moves Mountains*, we see the use of a row of people, an implicit statement by the author.

To continue, it is not only in these two works that Alÿs makes use of a line. In *The Green Line*, Jerusalem, 2004, Alÿs performed a linear walk with a leaking can of green paint, following the route pencilled on a map by Moshe Dayan at the end of the

war between Israel and Jordan in 1948. In this interesting work, we see Alÿs breaking a hole in the paint can, and walking the municipality of Jerusalem, every once in a while filling up the can again.

“Sometimes doing something poetic can become political and sometimes doing something political can become poetic.”

– Francis Alÿs

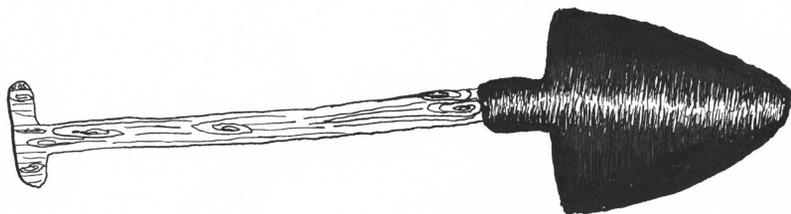
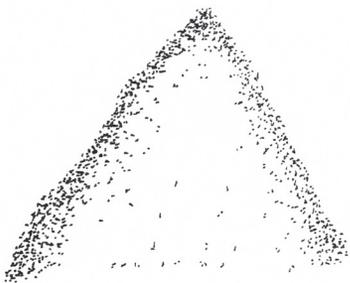
13 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Al%C3%BFs

14 <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/painting-present-francis-aly>

15 <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/francis-aly/francis-aly-story-deception-room-guide/francis-aly-3>

16 Alÿs, Francis, 'A Story of Deception', Tate Publishing, a division of Tate Enterprises Ltd, Millbank, London, 2010.

17 <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/32471/francis-als/>



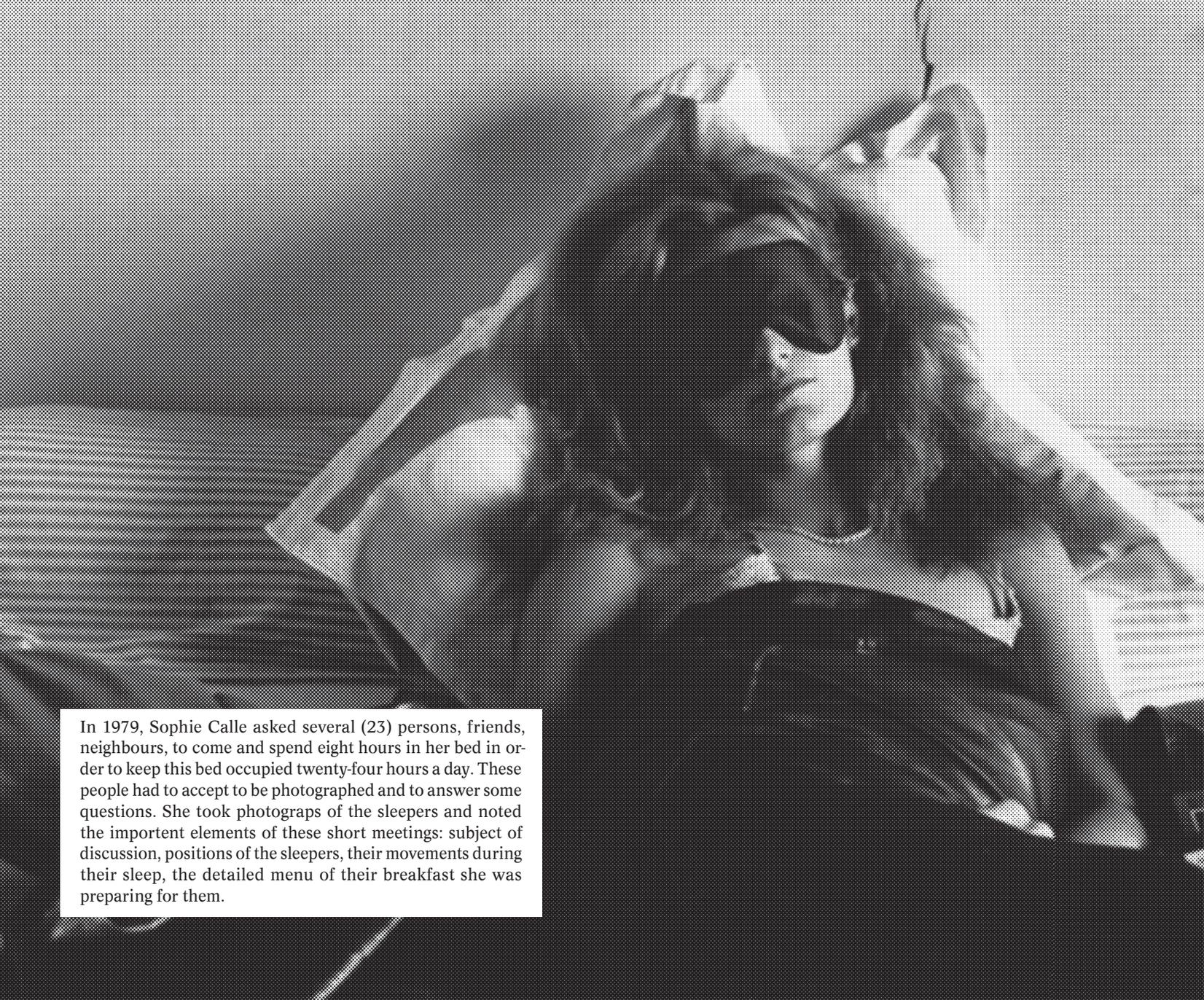
And a Closer Look to Sophie Calle ...

“By discovering artistic value in chance events of ordinary life, Calle displays parallels with the Situationists, who, as Nicolas Bourriaud observes in *Relational Aesthetics*, follow a concept of construction, ‘intended to replace artistic representation by the experimental realisation of artistic energy in everyday settings’.¹⁸

Sophie Calle (1953) is a French writer, photographer, installation artist, and conceptual artist. Calle’s work is distinguished by its use of arbitrary sets of constraints, and evokes the French literary movement of the 1960s known as ¹⁹ *Oulipo* . Her work frequently depicts human vulnerability, and examines identity and intimacy. She is recognised for her detective-like ability to follow strangers and investigate their private lives. Her photographic work often includes panels of text of her own writing.²⁰

Calle creates planned but never completely controllable situations regarding

the line between public and private, subject and object, self and other, art and life. Calle photographs and makes notes during her process as evidence, like a detective. Still, her final work keeps on changing depending on where the work is exhibited or by which book it is being issued. The one project can again be seen as a follow-up or response to the next project. A number of Calle’s works: In *The Address Book*, 2012, Calle has contacted every person in an address book, which she found on the street, approached and asked for a description of the owner that belonged to the address book. Based on the answers she made a public portrait of a person, without ever having met that person or asking for permission. In *The Detective*, 1980, Calle hired a private detective to follow her, which noted how she that day visited all the places in Paris which held some emotional significance for her. Without the detective knowing that Calle was the plot of him following her. His written documentation such as “The subject crosses the Jardin de Luxembourg” became part of



In 1979, Sophie Calle asked several (23) persons, friends, neighbours, to come and spend eight hours in her bed in order to keep this bed occupied twenty-four hours a day. These people had to accept to be photographed and to answer some questions. She took photographs of the sleepers and noted the important elements of these short meetings: subject of discussion, positions of the sleepers, their movements during their sleep, the detailed menu of their breakfast she was preparing for them.

the work that was exhibited. In *Room with a View*, 2003, Calle slept on the Eiffel Tower and asked strangers to read her stories to keep her awake. *Take Care of Yourself*, 2007, arose by the ending of her relationship by a mail, sent by from her boyfriend. Which encouraged her to let the mail interpret by hundreds of women; they each analysed it or responded to it derived out of their profession. In the series *The Hotel*, 1983, Calle posed as a chambermaid in a Venice pensione to investigate the lives of strangers through their possessions and habits. In the guests' absence, she photographed opened luggage, laundry, contents of bathrooms, and even trashcans.

For "The Hotel," I spent one year to find the hotel, I spent three months going through the text and writing it, I spent three months going through the photographs, and I spent one day deciding it would be this size and this frame ... it's the last thought in the process.

— Sophie Calle

Sophie Calle can be seen as a 'project

artist' just like Francis Alÿs, in that the process and its implementation is put at the same value as the final end product. But with Calle's work the investigations are often about herself, or else she is very personally involved. Alÿs, in contrast, tends to withdraw himself as the artistic subject of the work. To examine their differences further, in Calle's collaboration, there is an existing dialogue. Calle's work majorly centers around the one-on-one relations which produce it, whether between herself and strangers, or acquaintances, or intimates.

Nevertheless, Calle also makes use of *forced collaborations*, during which her collaborators are unaware, being spied on by her as a private detective. In reflection, if the person is not aware of being the subject of Calle's work, than we cannot deem this a collaboration.

One of the reasons I wish to discuss Sophie Calle's oeuvre is because she is a very good example of an artist who does not have a clear idea beforehand what exactly will occur in her own work. She depends on strangers whose responses

are unscripted and unreliable, and makes work despite, but also resulting from this uncertainty. Indeed, she has certain guidelines to her work, but can still be surprised by what will happen through unanticipated discoveries.

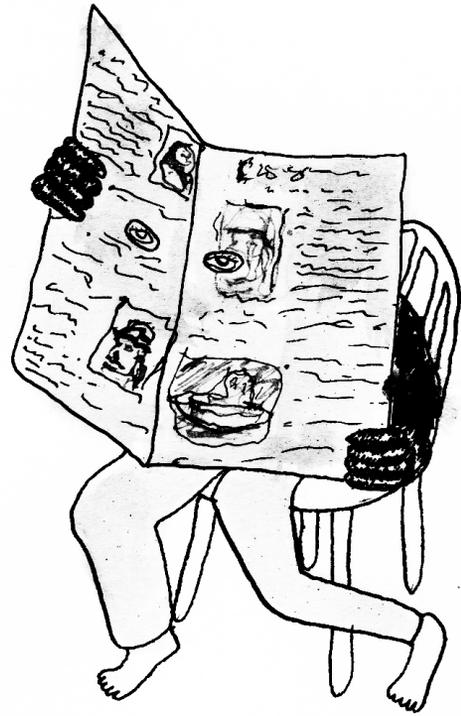
Fascinatingly, the reason Calle started following others in Paris is because, according to her, she was lonely and indecisive, no longer familiar with the city. Following strangers turned out to be interesting enough to make into art. Calle engages these strangers or other unwitting participants through asking unexpected questions. In this way, the people are caught off-guard, usually resulting in an open and accepting attitude. As the artist explains, “Often it comes down to a why not, which usually leads to a yes.”²¹

18 <http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/sophie-calle-talking-to-strangers>

19 Oulipo short for French: Ouvroir de littérature potentielle; roughly translated: “workshop of potential literature” is a loose gathering of (mainly) French-speaking writers and mathematicians who seek to create works using constrained writing techniques. It was founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais. Other notable members have included novelists Georges Perec and Italo Calvino, poets Oskar Pastior, Jean Lescure and poet/mathematician Jacques Roubaud. The group defines the term *littérature potentielle* as (rough translation): “the seeking of new structures and patterns which may be used by writers in any way they enjoy.”

20 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophie_Calle

21 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRx7nFVuLwA>



Conclusion

Regarding the authorship of a work, in the situation that an artist initiates the idea, which then shapes itself due to the others who contribute to it, the work should be sited as being made “by,” instead of “with,” also regarding financial aspects. In this way, some artists’ egos might be diminished as they take some distance from their work. My hypothesis is this might actually improve the work; Still, I do think that the originator of the ideas should receive more credibility than those executing them. This is because the originator shares their ideas, inspiring others to do so as well. In a more reciprocal exchange, the author of the work should refer to its work as being collaborative, by both crediting participants and sharing the financial outcome.

Starting this thesis I had in mind that Francis Aljys, as well as Sophie Calle, were great examples of an artist as author, initiator, collaborator, and in the words of Barthes, scriptor. But having studied them

more closely, I arrived to the conclusion that Aljys does not collaborate in a way that blurs authorship, since he puts limitations on dialogue and therefore maintains control. Calle could, perhaps, be called a medium author, as she dives deeply into her fascination, nearly drowning in it. Often, she takes on an identity other than her own, while her fascinations are, paradoxically, often to do with herself as subject.

As for Aljys the subject matter is often focused externally from the self, centered around political statements. For example, he aims to question the role of poetic acts in highly charged political situations, while acknowledging that the relation of poetics to politics is always contingent. Furthermore it seems that collaboration is an effective tool in both the generation of opportunities, as well as to reach certain goals. Still, one might ask, if everyone would constantly collaborate, would exclusivity/originality remain intact? Would artists, then, be contrastingly inspired to become the exclusive originator?

A DRAWING ON:

Besides you my thesis, I also collaborated with the artist Koos Buster Stroucken. Who made illustrations based upon given sentences that were connected to the works described in this thesis. According to these sentences Stroucken made the illustrations enclosed. Within the context and process of this thesis I wanted to have a cooperation with another artist, and thereby inserting someone else's work in this thesis.

*The Excavator and the Lotus,
Roland Huppeldepup,
Francis Alÿs and Sophie Calle,*

by Koos Buster Stroucken, 2017.

Thank you Buster for collaborating with me and for contributing these wonderful drawings to give to my thesis and its readers.

Thesis, Thank You for Cooperating.

Special thanks to:

Alexandra Landré
Buster Stroucken
Fabian Hamacher
Maddy Bullard

Bibliography

Books

Alÿs, Francis, 'A Story of Deception', Tate Publishing, a division of Tate Enterprises Ltd, Millbank, London, 2010.

Bishop, Claire, 'ARTIFICIAL HELLS, participatory art and the politics of spectatorship', Verso, London, 2012.

Bishop, Claire, 'Participation', Documents of Contemporary Art, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2006.

Rainer, Yvonne, 'A Woman Who--: Essays, Interviews, Scripts, Looking Myself in the Mouth', The John Hopkins University Press, 1999.

Lind, Maria, Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and

Collaborative Practices, Black Dog Publishing, 2007.
Bourriaud, Nicholas, 'Relational Aesthetics', 1989.

Benjamin, Walter, 'The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', 1935 In: 'Illuminations', Hannah Arendt, Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, New York, 1969.

Scott, Emily Eliza, Kirsten J Swenson, 'Critical Landscapes: Art, Space, Politics' University of California Press, Oakland, California, 2015.

Robinson, Julia, 'John Cage' October Files, The MIT Press, Massachusetts, 2011.

Calle, Sophie, 'Take Care of Yourself', Actes Sud, 2007.

Alÿs, Francis, Ferguson, Russel, Fisher, Jean, 'Francis Alÿs', Phaidon, 2007.

Cross, Susan, Markonish, Denise, 'Sol Lewitt 100 views', MASS MoCA, North Adams, 2009.

Calle, Sophie, 'M'as Tu Vue? - Did You See Me?',

Prestel, 2003.

Biesta, Gert J.J., 'Het prachtige risico van onderwijs', Phronese, 2014.

Articles

Gratton, Jhonnie, Review: Sophie Calle's True Stories: More of the Same?, Edinburgh University Press, Vol. 26, No. 3 (November 2003), pp. 108-122.

Saverino, Rosa, La visite guidée et l'exposition du « moi » de Sophie Calle, Dalhousie University, Dalhousie French Studies Vol. 87 (Summer 2009), pp. 95-104.

Barthes, Roland, 'The Death of the Author', American journal Aspen, no. 5-6, 1967.

Wright, Steven, 'The Delicate Essence of Artistic Collaboration', Kala Press/Black Umbrella, Third Text, Vol. 18, Issue 6, 2004, 533-545, 2004.

Alÿs, Francis, Parkett No. 69, Parkett Publishers, 2004.

Anton, Saul, '1000 WORDS: FRANCIS ALÿS', ARTFORUM, Summer 2002.

Benjamin, Walter, Bostock, Anna, Stanley, Mitchell, 'Understanding Brecht' Verso, London, 1998.

Foucault, Michel, 'Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology', The New Press, 1998.

Bankowsky, Jack, 'Tent Community: Art Fair Art', ARTFORUM, October, 2005

Websites

<http://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=643>

<http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/sophie-calle-talking-to-strangers>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRx7nFVuLwA>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophie_Calle

<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/painting-present-francis-aly>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Al%C3%BFs

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roland_Barthes#The_Author_and_the_scriptor

<http://www.artbook.com/9780979956294.html>

<http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/sophie-calle-talking-to-strangers> <http://brooklynrail.org/2009/06/artseen/take-care-of-yourself>

<https://www.vn.nl/take-care-of-yourself-sophie-calle/>

<http://socks-studio.com/2014/03/15/a-line-in-the-landscape-francis-aly-when-faith-moves-mountains/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZedESyQEnMA>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/film-artists-exhibition/lightbox-francis-aly>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/painting-present-francis-aly>

<https://vimeo.com/15607397> <http://www.mg-lj.si/en/events/1442/lectures-mechtild-widrich/>

<http://pavilionmagazine.org/chantal-mouffe-agonistic-democracy-and-radical-politics/>

<http://www.goldinsenneby.com/gs/?p=116>

https://books.google.nl/books?id=_s8XBQAAQBA-J&pg=PA244&lpg=PA244&dq=delegation+and+conceptual+art&source=bl&ots=rLJ3VZFXNi&sig=KDaNnRN5Wkt9Nqeb53Df2R4Lafg&hl=nl&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj9xJ729Z3QA-hWMDRoKHWRJCGsQ6AEIMDAC#v=onepage&q=delegation%20and%20conceptual%20art&f=false <https://www.brain-pickings.org/2012/07/05/where-the-heart-beats-john-cage-kay-larson/>

<http://francisalys.com/when-faith-moves-mountains/>

<http://ubu.com/papers/Sharits-Flicker-Films.pdf>

<http://eipcp.net/transversal/1204/kravagna/en>

<http://post.thing.net/files/relationalaesthetics.pdf>

<http://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=643>

<https://fillip.ca/content/what-is-a-participatory-practice>

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/jan/31/sculptor-richard-deacon-tate-britain>

Bachelor Thesis, Fine Arts Department

Written by Lois Richard

Under supervision of Alexandra Landré

Graphic Design by Fabian Hamacher

Drawings by Koos Buster Stroucken

©2017 Lois Richard

Royal Academy of Arts, The Hague