

# GETTING RID OF OURSELVES



Claire Fontaine, *Untitled (Tennis ball sculpture)*, 2008

GETTING RID OF  
OURSELVES

CURATED BY  
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## GETTING RID OF OURSELVES HELENA RECKITT

It is hard to think of a cultural field that better exemplifies the conditions laid out by the political philosopher Franco “Bifo” Berardi in *The Soul at Work* than the contemporary art world. Whereas factory employees down tools at the end of their shifts, in the cultural sector work has seeped into every aspect of our lives. Bifo explains: “Our desiring energy is trapped in the trick of self-enterprise, our libidinal investments are regulated according to economic rules, our attention is captured in the precariousness of virtual networks: every fragment of mental activity must be transformed into capital.” In short: “Putting the soul to work: this is the new form of alienation.”<sup>1</sup>

This colonization of our social, communicative and affective faculties characterizes the art world’s 24/7 demands. Today more than ever, artists and arts professionals are under pressure to build their personal reputations and capitalize on their social relationships. Networking, CV building, and being seen at the right events around the globe with the right people, we must constantly promote “the brand called You,” as the management writer Tom Peters called it. Peters addressed his readers in 1997 as members of “an economy of free agents” who were “looking to establish your own micro equivalent of the Nike swoosh.” Arguing that there’s “literally no limit to the ways you can go about enhancing your profile,” he counselled “the big trick to building your brand is to find ways to nurture your network of colleagues -- consciously.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>  
Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2009, p.24.

<sup>2</sup>  
Tom Peters, “The Brand Called YOU”, *Fast Company*, August/September, 1997, [www.fastcompany.com/28905/brand-called-you](http://www.fastcompany.com/28905/brand-called-you), accessed July 7, 2014.

To reinvent oneself constantly, working under precarious conditions, on short-term contracts with different groups of people: this is the art world's apparent "freedom," and a cornerstone of the new economy. The artist's vaunted "flexible personality" has become the standard by which all are expected to function.<sup>3</sup>

In a prestigious field like contemporary art, where a steady stream of workers, interns and volunteers seems prepared to labour for low or even no wages, the notion that work is its own reward has led to dangerous levels of exploitation and self-exploitation. The expectation of "sacrificial labour" routinely carried out by artists now extends to all those who work in the cultural realm. This over-identification with work would not be explained simply by the presence of cellphones and laptops that make us always available and always "on." The narcissistic validation that work gives us reflects a spiritual crisis, Bifo argues. Work would not permeate our lives so entirely if it did not fill a void – that of the capitalism's empty promises of fulfillment through consumerism and accumulation. Values once associated with the church, the family or the community are now filled by work.

As commercial gallery conglomerates dominate the global art market, corporate models increasingly prevail in non-profit art organizations. The erosion of public funding for the arts, which has reached critical conditions in many regions, makes arts organizations ever more dependent on private and corporate supporters. These donors take places on boards of directors and acquisitions committees. In return, they want a piece of the action – be it directly influencing curatorial and collection policies or, more subtly, networking with other well-to-do-

<sup>3</sup> See Brian Holmes, *The Flexible Personality: For a New Cultural Critique*, 2002, [www.eipcc.net/transversal/1106/holmes/en](http://www.eipcc.net/transversal/1106/holmes/en).

patrons and hanging out with celebrity artists and curators at biennales, art fairs, private views, soirees, behind-the-scenes studio visits and tours. These events give them access to the creativity and charisma of artists and art world luminaries, the art world's living currency. As Isabelle Graw noted:

For value to be attributed to an artwork it needs to be personalized and subjectified to a certain degree. It is for this reason that many collectors expect to get a hold of a slice of the life of an artist if they acquire her work. As a product it relates to a person (its author) who in return seems to be somewhat contained by it. The work is saturated with her life, her "lived labour," and is valuable for this reason only.<sup>4</sup>

Courting potential supporters has become a major preoccupation for institutional directors and curators who must "collect collectors" and persuade them to purchase works for their museums and underwrite their curatorial projects. As personal relationships are increasingly put to work, we find it difficult to tell the difference between art world schmoozing and intimate or collective forms of assembly that serve no professional function. Our time for non-work relationships disappears, and those bonds in turn lose their spontaneity and vitality.

<sup>4</sup> Isabelle Graw, "Preface," in *Art & Subjecthood: The Return of the Figure in Semicapitalism*, Isabelle Graw, Daniel Birnbaum, Nikolaus Hirsch (eds), Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2011, p.17.

## THE TRUE ARTIST PRODUCES THE MOST PRESTIGIOUS COMMODITY <sup>5</sup>

Appropriation and post-internet aesthetics notwithstanding, the art world still invests stock in heroic artistic self-expression. Both the artist's hand and signature count as markers and symptoms of authenticity. Within this system there are obvious winners and inevitable losers. While the work of a tiny percentage of commercially and institutionally successful artists develops brand recognition, hordes of emerging, amateur and unfashionable artists struggle to make a living or maintain a career. And yet, as Gregory Sholette writes:

Without this obscure mass of "failed" artists the small cadre of successful artists would find it difficult, if not impossible, to sustain the global art world as it appears today. Without this invisible mass, the ranks of middle and lower level arts administrators would be depleted, there would be no one left to fabricate the work of art stars or to manage their studios and careers."<sup>6</sup>

The cocktail party demand that we "circulate" exerts pressure on artists and arts professionals. Basel, Venice, Miami, Sharjah, Hong Kong, St Petersburg ... the art world calendar is dominated by events that require our presence. For artists securing the next commission or museum show, or curators seeking another gig after their current project ends, it is imperative to be seen to be making the scene. Too bad if personal ties – non-art world relationships, sick or ailing relatives, or, heaven forbid, children – get in the way. The

<sup>5</sup>

This subheading is taken from a 2004 smoke drawing by Claire Fontaine.

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Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, Pluto Press, London, 2011, p.3.

fantasy of the footloose and fancy-free artist now extends to the behavior expected of all those who work in the sector. As our inbox fills with unread e-flux announcements, we fear that we are missing out. Freelancers whose precarious livelihoods draw currency from being out-and-about and up-to-date feel this anxiety especially keenly. They dare not risk being marginalized and forgotten.

Just as artists and art employees must constantly circulate (evoking Hans Ulrich Obrist's 2006 book, *dontstopdontstopdontstopdontstop*), so must artworks. Dealers report that more and more sales are conducted on the basis of JPEGs, without the collector seeing the art itself. Just as quickly as artworks are purchased, they are sent into storage, often in climate-controlled facilities near airport hubs where they are beneath the tax collector's radar, and where they can be sold on with minimal fuss.

New visual art is starting to reflect internet aesthetics as well as procedures. Of his students' art in New York, Sholette observes how digital images, "rendered in low resolution with acidic smart phone colours" frequently appear as source material. "Fast-paced paging through crowdsourced databases such as Flickr or Google has also become second nature when researching new project ideas. But more to the point, a certain compulsory 'connectivity' infests student art assignments, even those rooted in traditional media."<sup>7</sup>

The networked behaviour of artworks also concerns Michael Sanchez. Likening paintings and sculptures to avatars, he describes how works of art function as "social-networking

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Gregory Sholette, *After OWS: Social Practice Art, Abstraction, and the Limits of the Social*, 2012, e-flux, [www.e-flux.com/journal/after-ows-social-practice-art-abstraction-and-the-limits-of-the-social/](http://www.e-flux.com/journal/after-ows-social-practice-art-abstraction-and-the-limits-of-the-social/) accessed July 7, 2014.

devices” that are “programmed to connect with the right actors, to get into the right shows, to convey the right profile.”<sup>8</sup> The citational turn in contemporary art, with its prevalence of appropriation, re-enactment and quotation tactics, also reflects network operations. Writing about the resurgence of Marc Camille Chaimowicz’s career, which occurred when the artist recontextualized his art as part of an “affinity group” of younger artists, Sanchez recalls how “tastes and preferences circulated through this niche, creating relationships of ‘complicity.’” He observes the “canny strategies of reciprocal value production” that ensued as “objects began to engage in their own networking activity, forming alliances made visible as much through shared references as through formal rhymes.”<sup>9</sup> As an art critic and contemporary art historian, Sanchez is equally clear-eyed about the function he fulfills in mediating, publicizing and validating contemporary art. “The activities of curating one’s own life, curating the social network, and curating objects are no longer separable,” he writes.<sup>10</sup>

The interactive nature of networks is a hallmark of the feedback loop that Sanchez describes. Nowhere is this more evident than in how we supply social media with personal data, movements and connections in exchange for gaining “free admission” to virtual networks. As prosumers whose consumption of and interaction with a product reflects back on it, we feed the internet with information that is sold on to third parties who then market it back to us. The internet’s commercial dominance, which goes hand-in-glove with its surveillance functions, is a bitter contrast to the anti-hierarchical ambitions of net culture pioneers. The knowledge-sharing ethos of the open source movement has

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Sanchez, “Contemporary Art, Daily,” *ibid*, p.57.

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Sanchez, “Contemporary Art, Daily,” *ibid*, p.57.

produced the phenomenon whereby mega-corporations profit from freely-given intellectual labour and human data. This massive investment of unpaid work has led Andrew Ross to describe the net as “the greatest collective construction job in all of history.”<sup>11</sup>

## STRIKE

Rejecting these terms of operations, the artistic practices highlighted in *Getting Rid of Ourselves* in different ways obscure, delegate, distribute or withdraw the conventional signs of authorship and artistic subjectivity. Some artists mimic anonymous state and corporate tactics. Others surrender their artistic egos and agencies to stage porous relationships with other artists and their works. Other artists in the exhibition remove signs of their manual and/ or affective labour altogether. Inspired by Herman Melville’s 1853 book *Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street*, whose protagonist withdraws from the act of legal copying and refuses to work at all, artists respond to the demand that they perform their subjectivities by insisting that they “prefer not to.” Withdrawal here functions not as an act of romantic escape but as a quiet yet stubborn refusal to submit to affective demands. It makes unmarked or unremarkable labour visible by its absence.

The art gallery at OCAD U is a fitting site for this show as its professional gallery was inaugurated in 2007 with a Bartleby-esque exhibition by Rirkrit Tiravanija. Before it opened to the public, Rirkrit arranged for the gallery entrance to be bricked over and spraypainted with the phrase

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Andrew Ross, *No-Collar: The Human Workplace and Its Hidden Costs*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2003, p.217.



*NE TRAVAILLEZ JAMAIS* (“NEVER WORK”), the rallying cry devised by Guy Debord that became famous during the uprisings of May 1968.<sup>12</sup> On the last day of the exhibition, the wall – together with a second bricked-up entrance, now covered in chalk graffiti, much of it debating the strengths and weaknesses of Rirkrit’s piece – was knocked through, and inside the space there was a party with bright green cocktails. Relevant for OCAD U’s rhetoric about art’s social role and economic function, Debord’s protest about the deadening hand of work provides an apt context for the performance of artistic defection, delegation, diffusion and withdrawal.

Claire Fontaine, a “readymade branded artist” who was founded by Fulvia Carnevale and James Thornhill in 2004, has consistently explored the human strike in her artwork as well as her writing. Claire Fontaine unpacks the resonance of Bartleby’s polite refusal.

His rebellion creates a ground that nothing can get a grip on, because he does not say what he would prefer to be different (he does not formulate a claim) or what he dislikes about his condition (he does not express a denunciation). His gesture robs the power of its power, at which point that the lawyer who employs him experiences inappropriate feelings for Bartleby, something akin to love, and falls prey to the impression that his virility is being shaken. The roots of his authority are undermined by the situation and he finds a part of himself, the one which takes sides with Bartleby’s revolt, hostile to his own role as a boss.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>

Rirkrit’s exhibition was commissioned by Charles Reeve, Director of the OCAD U Gallery at the time. To some university administrators and faculty expecting socially-ameliorative activities from this supposedly convivial artist, Rirkrit’s antagonistic gesture didn’t go down too well.

<sup>13</sup>

Claire Fontaine, “Existential Metonymy and Imperceptible Abstractions,” in *Human Strike Has Already Begun & Other Writings*, PML Books, Lüneburg, 2013, p.56.

Bartleby's calm yet unyielding resistance resonates with Claire Fontaine's withdrawal from the subjective regime of artistic expression and authenticity. Her work in the exhibition, *Untitled (Tennis balls sculpture)*, presents balls with small slits or mouths into which are smuggled contraband. It refers to ways in which prisoners obtain objects that wouldn't pass security checks, which have been thrown to them over the prison walls. The everyday items hidden inside these balls – matches and pencils, pain killers and plasters, cigarette filters and string – evoke the prisoners' absent bodies and their lack of basic amenities. As Claire Fontaine remarks, "there is a poverty in these presents sent to invisible receivers that transports us into a forgotten universe of deprivation and violence."<sup>14</sup> Installed in the gallery, these unassuming balls mingle and coalesce. They might well trip one up, introducing an element of instability into the exhibition.

Also appearing quite innocuous, even decorative, is Claire Fontaine's key chain work, *Passe-partout (Quebec)*  
<http://www.lysator.liu.se/mit-guide/mit-guide.html>  
<http://www.hackerethic.org>  
<http://www.lockpicks.com>  
<http://www.lockpicking101.com>  
<http://www.gregmiller.net/locks/makelockpicks.html>  
Yet the unobtrusive objects that it's made from double as lock picks: saw blades, bicycle spokes, paper-clips, Allen keys, safety pins and hair pins. The instructions for creating these devices, which appear as part of the title, are drawn from anonymous online posts. Small touristy tchotchkes on the key rings highlight Claire Fontaine's itinerant professional lifestyle. They evoke the travel undertaken by Carnevale and Thornhill on Claire Fontaine's behalf, introducing "an ironic glance on the relationship of the artists to trips and the gain or loss

<sup>14</sup>

Claire Fontaine, email to the author, July 7, 2014.

that accompany them."<sup>15</sup> This practice has led Carnevale and Thornhill to describe themselves as Claire Fontaine's "assistants."

Claire Fontaine's smoke drawing on the ceiling is inspired by the kind of clandestine messages made with lighters or matches that appear in enclosed public spaces (staircases, lifts, toilets). It comes from a text by Bifo from December 1976. "How many comrades, killed in the solitude, a cop on their shoulders, a thousand guardians in their brain? How many comrades killed in the solitude of the confusion, of the enforced silence, of the paranoia, of the misery, of the impotency?"

As in this example, citation is a recurrent and central part of Claire Fontaine's practice. Her appropriation of other people's words is linked to her use of vernacular objects and devices, exemplifying her rejection of heroic authorship. In this way her work both reflects and pays respect to the artistic and political traditions that it builds on. Keeping the voices from earlier eruptive moments present so they can be deployed in the future, Claire Fontaine works in an anticipatory manner, fearing for the worst while hoping for the best. Of her smoke drawings, she has said, "the content of these inscriptions realised with fire is often related to the truths that we cannot change because of their socio-economical inertial power or their historical weight, they remain then as ghosts of extinguished flames over our heads, soiling the white cube and disturbing our thoughts."<sup>16</sup>

The human strike, which starts with the adoption of behaviour that contradicts other people's expectations, is a cornerstone of Claire Fontaine's work. In the art world that entails

<sup>15</sup>

Claire Fontaine, email, *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>

Claire Fontaine, email, *ibid.*



rejecting investments in authenticity and authorship in order to free subjectivities from the gendered, economic and affective stereotypes that constrain them.

As part of the exhibition public programme Claire Fontaine gives a lecture about Italian feminists of the 1970s including their theories of the human strike. The lecture is a chance to educate her public about this movement, and its important critique of how patriarchy puts all affective and reproductive resources to work. At the same time, by refusing to conform to the behaviour expected of her, the talk is an example of human strike: invited to give a conventional “artist talk,” Claire Fontaine will instead lecture on the work of political radicals.

The artist group Bernadette Corporation, whose 2002 film *Get Rid of Yourself* is a conceptual resource for this show as well as a basis for its title, has explored tactics of refusal and withdrawal in their work. *Get Rid of Yourself* centres on the actions of the Black Bloc anarchist group at the 2001 anti-G8 summit demonstrations in Genoa. Members of the Black Bloc, we are told in voiceover, wear black “so you can more easily know who you are walking with. And to.. uh... everybody is looking the same so it is far more difficult to spot out .. uh.. individuals.”<sup>17</sup> Operating under a fictional female name, as does Claire Fontaine whose members have at times overlapped, Bernadette Corporation functions as a collective agency. Both Bernadette and Claire Fontaine refuse the false securities of identity politics, which offer the illusion of belonging but end up imprisoning subjectivity. Instead, following Giorgio Agamben, they court a “whatever singularity.” A movement of simultaneous “desubjectivisation and resubjectivisation,” this involves “an exit from a certain

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See Bennett Simpson, “Techniques of Today – Bennett Simpson on Bernadette Corporation,” *Artforum*, September, 2004, [www.bernadettecorporation.com/introduction](http://www.bernadettecorporation.com/introduction), accessed July 8, 2014.

type of identification that goes with obligations, stereotypes and projections – and an entrance into a new state, less defined, more uncertain, but freed of the weights that burdened the previous identity and allowed the perpetuation of the status quo.”<sup>18</sup>

## HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

There is a tautological quality to several works in *Getting Rid of Ourselves*. In these pieces, the process entailed in making the work comprises the work itself. Heath Bunting’s *Off the Shelf Identity* is a small case containing a wallet with various bank, medical, gym and travel cards that form evidence of what he calls a “synthetic off-the-shelf (OTS) British natural person.” Also included are letters mailed to “Tony Smith,” keys to Smith’s house, a rubber stamp of Smith’s signature, and his cell phone. The kit is available for £500 (\$900 CDN). Bunting’s *Map of Influence* handouts are also in the case. Here Bunting charts the steps required to provide legal evidence of a British ID.

These documents are part of Bunting’s *Status Project* in which he investigates the traces of identity that we leave, queries who or what is accorded legal identity and proposes tactics of identity mutation. Highlighting the eradication of privacy in today’s surveillance society, Bunting maps the virtual movements made by a person through the information they provide as they engage with organisations and businesses.

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Claire Fontaine, ‘Existential Metonymy and Imperceptible Abstractions’, in *Human Strike Has Already Begun & Other Writings*, *ibid*, p.56.

Informed by a Situationist-inspired activation of everyday life, Bunting's art coincides with his activities as a hacker, an identity guerrilla and a curator of irrational.org. As part of the exhibition Bunting is hosting an Artist Survival Strategies workshop on Toronto Island in which he will teach practical woodland and shoreline survival skills for sourcing clean water, fire, food, shelter and weapons. He will contrast these life-sustaining skills with urban street-level and office survival strategies. The workshop builds on Bunting's extensive experience of surviving on the margins of social and technological surveillance and control.

Bunting is banned from entering the USA as a result of his "anti-genetic" activism and his *BorderXing Guide*, which investigates the restriction of movement between national boundaries. Celebrated for his early net.art, Bunting takes advantage of holes in existing systems or technologies. Hackers discuss the manipulation of such faultlines under the rubric of "the exploit." As Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker explain: "a simple laser pointer can blind a surveillance camera when the beam is aimed directly at the camera's lens. With this type of cloaking one is not hiding, simply nonexistent to that node. The subject has full presence but is simply not there *on the screen*." <sup>19</sup>

Like Bunting, Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša use legal systems to devise new identities. Yet where Bunting tries to vanish in the cracks of the system, Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša make themselves hyperbolically visible. In 1997 the three artists changed their names to that of the conservative Prime Minister, Janez Janša, shortly after joining his party, the Slovene Democratic Party (SDS). Their act took literally a phrase in a letter sent to them by the

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Alexander R Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 2007, p.135.

Prime Minister: "The more of us there are, the faster we will reach our goal!" Playing with tropes of repetition and seriality, Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša interrogate the role played by the artist's name in building reputation and cultural capital. The logic of the artwork as multiple or edition now extends to the production of the artist himself. By subsuming and collectivizing their identities, all works and statements subsequently produced by the artists will be read as group endeavours – as will all their previous artistic efforts.

Against the colours of the Slovenian flag, and accompanied by a video of them reading their letter to the Prime Minister, the artists exhibit proof of their political, financial and legal identities: three identical SDS membership cards, signed MasterCard, and government ID cards (the latter considered the possession of the State, and thus not theirs to exhibit or sell). Patriotism and patrilineage are tied up in the process of naming. Their MasterCard depict Mount Triglav, Slovenia's highest peak and a symbol of national pride. In former-Yugoslavia, names evoke ethnic affiliations that may provide unwanted links to the past. The Personal Name Act under which they changed their names was passed in 2006, during Prime Minister Janša's rule, in response to the desire of some citizens to make their names sound more Slovenian. Prime Minister Janša himself understands the nationalist connotations of name, choosing to be known publicly by the Slovenian-sounding "Janez," instead of the Russian "Ivan."

Janez Janša has characterised their project as a "virulent gesture," commenting how "a virus breaks into the system, and the system no longer works. There are no preventive measures already present within the system to prepare it for such cases." <sup>20</sup> Galloway and Thacker also dwell on the

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Lev Kreft, "The Name as a Readymade: An interview with Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša," *NAME Readymade*, (exhib. cat.), Moderna galerija / Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana 2008, trans. Polona Petek, [www.aksioma.org/The-Name-As-a-ReadymadeAn](http://www.aksioma.org/The-Name-As-a-ReadymadeAn), accessed July 8, 2014.

link between biological and computer viruses. Both “exploit the normal functioning of the host systems to produce more copies of themselves,” they elaborate. “Viruses are life exploiting life”.<sup>21</sup>

## GETTING RID OF MYSELF

But if the artists in *Getting Rid of Ourselves* go to such lengths to complicate their presentations of self, what about my own curatorial agency and authority? What does “getting rid of ourselves” mean or do to me? This was a question put to me when I first presented my ideas for the exhibition to a class of curating students several years ago.<sup>22</sup> It was a question that I couldn’t answer at the time and that I have thought a lot about since.

One of the prompts for the show was my frustration with the pressure to become increasingly professionalized and “branded” as a curator, which left me feeling objectified, even object-like. Consequently, I wanted the exhibition both to diffuse and to make more visible my curatorial agency. Instead of the traditional model of the autonomous artist and mediating/gatekeeping curator, I wanted to create something more dynamic, complicated and reciprocal. One way I tried to do this was by inviting artists to participate in the curatorial process. As I explained in my letter of invitation: “This could entail suggesting the work of another artist, devising an element of the installation design, adding to the website or

<sup>21</sup>

Galloway and Thacker, *The Exploit*, ibid, p.83.

<sup>22</sup>

The question was posed by Anca Rujoiu, then a student on the MFA Curating programme at Goldsmiths, University of London, in 2011.

publicity materials or introducing a text to be presented or discussed at a public event”. In return, I offered to divide up my curatorial fee (“such as it is”).

Three artists/artist groups responded to my expanded invitation. Kernel, whose members have backgrounds in architecture and software development as well as curating and art, offered to design the installation, a prospect that was both tempting and testing, as I had struggled with how to deal with the gallery’s lobby-like space and lack of usable walls. The exhibition budget did not enable Kernel to make a site visit and almost all design discussions were carried out remotely via Dropbox, Google Docs and email. When Kernel first proposed dividing up the gallery with wire mesh structures I was a bit uncertain. Their designs seemed at once too much and too little: in danger of dominating the other artists’ work, while too weak to be legible as aesthetic gestures.

But as the process of designing the installation unfolded I started to appreciate the conceptual resonance of Kernel’s use of “enclosures,” with its illusions to the historic procedures by which common agrarian land was privatized, and the link with contemporary forms of enclosure under neoliberalism. I also enjoyed the sense that I was sharing responsibility for the exhibition’s overall aesthetic with other people – especially such active and enthusiastic, albeit virtual, collaborators: Kernel designed the overall exhibition layout, which I tweaked during installation. I even started to ask them to make decisions about what artworks should be included, a surrender of my curatorial authority that I found quite freeing.

Kernel’s *Enclosures* are barriers that are nonetheless permeable. Choreographing the gallery visitor as well as the artworks, Kernel’s design lays bare the kinds of architectural, design and curatorial procedures that generally go unremarked. In blurring the work of the artist with that of the

designer and the curator, Kernel highlights the mediating and controlling roles of each. Of their working methods the artists have remarked how “the processes of production become the material and the condition that we reflect upon.”<sup>23</sup> Their artistic agency is therefore “something that is more than the sum of its parts, but that actually defines a fourth subjectivity, one that has its unique ways of dealing with ideas and forms, as well as its individual needs and desires.”<sup>24</sup>

In response to my invitation, Adrian Blackwell asked his fellow Scapegoat Collective members to help him devise the Walking/Reading Group on Dismantling Subjectivity and Space. Their efforts result in the series “Let’s Get Lost,” led by Blackwell and Marcin Kedzior, that will meet several times during the show. At the start of every meeting the group will explore the neighbourhood around OCAD U, discussing the readings in pairs (this technique is modeled on the Walking /Reading Group on Participation developed in 2013 by Ania Bas and Simone Mair). Participants will then return to the gallery where discussions will continue in Blackwell’s seating arrangement of sculptural objects, *Circles describing spheres*. In the context of student debt and the privatization of further education, the Walking/Reading group offers a free, peer-led alternative to formal study.

Blackwell’s forms are modeled on the anarchist meeting circle. As he explains, “Our world is a sphere, and its shape is often used as a metaphor to describe social and political worlds.” The equitable social relations imagined by these forms hope to engender new worlds that refuse “the violent

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Louis Doulas, “Kernel,” *Bomb Magazine*, April 3, 2014, [www.bombmagazine.org/article/1000054](http://www.bombmagazine.org/article/1000054), accessed July 7, 2014.

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Kernel, email to the author, June 21, 2014.

hierarchies that structure early 21st-century capitalism.”<sup>25</sup> Blackwell’s spheres can be adjusted into various forms including a forum, a round table and a ziggurat, or propped up against the gallery walls when not in use.

Goldin+Senneby came back to me with a more challenging request, as I might have expected. They asked for the entire exhibition budget, which they wanted to invest. As part of their *Passive Liquidity Provider* project, the financial strategist Claes-Henrik Julander had devised a trading algorithm to be used during the show. When their request was turned down, I came up with another approach. I asked participating artists to contribute their fees, which I offered together with my own, to Goldin+Senneby for the duration of the exhibition. “Trading will start on the first day of the show, with profits/losses distributed at its close”, I wrote. “I see this as somewhat akin to a ponzi scheme – although in this case the money really will be invested, and you would receive the results of the investment after the show ends.”

*Passive Liquidity Provider with Claes-Henrik Julander (strategic investor)*, 2013, takes place as part of a larger framework by Goldin+Senneby called *The Nordenskiöld Model*. Within this frame the artists attempt to (re)enact the scheme of 18th century alchemist August Nordenskiöld, who was employed by the Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus, on today’s financial markets. While the King believed that these efforts to produce gold would shore up the Swedish economy, Nordenskiöld had other ideas: his goal was to destroy the value of money entirely by distributing his

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Adrian Blackwell, *Circles Describing Spheres*, 2014, in “If I Can’t Dance To It, It’s Not My Revolution,” Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery, Haverford, [exhibits.haverford.edu/ificantdancetoit/essays/circles-describing-spheres/](http://exhibits.haverford.edu/ificantdancetoit/essays/circles-describing-spheres/), accessed July 3, 2014.

discoveries to all. Responding to the intertwined histories of money and alchemy, *The Nordenskiöld Model* also reflects the art market's seemingly alchemical powers to create capital from base matter.

The folder displayed under Plexiglas contains a confidential document specifying the strategy used for trading during the exhibition. In exchange for his strategy, Julander is given an artwork: the bound and sealed document on view, which contains his own algorithm.

While working on this essay I asked artists in the exhibition what the phrase "Getting Rid of Ourselves" meant to them. Goldin+Senneby directed me to their spokesperson, Angus Cameron, a political geographer based at Leicester University and the author of a book about offshore finance. Cameron has represented Goldin+Senneby at public events throughout the world, including giving artist talks on their behalf in Toronto and London, and being interviewed for the Serpentine's Summer Marathon by Hans Ulrich Obrist. Mimicking offshore techniques of camouflage and opacity, Goldin+Senneby call their delegation to Cameron "an act of withdrawal."

Speaking for them, Cameron emailed me a brief document called "Getting Rid of Goldin+Senneby." In it he argued that the artists' "oft-stated attempt to get rid of 'ourselves' is probably their most complete and significant failure to date." For despite barely appearing in public for a decade, Goldin+Senneby remain stubbornly present. "There is nothing quite so obdurately here than someone who announces that they are not *there*." Reflecting on his collusion with the artists – which has entailed travelling long distances for little or no pay – Cameron commented that "the effect has been to scatter versions of myself widely" at public events as well as in virtual and fictional renditions. In his covering

note Cameron remarked that he'd kept his comments on Goldin+Senneby's problems with the self "short and to the point." His email concluded: "And, no, they have not seen it."<sup>26</sup>

## SUBJECTIVITY, ABANDONED

In reaction to the on-demand affability and enthusiasm demanded by networked capitalism, a number of artworks here resist the demand that art perform its gregariousness. They withhold or complicate visual satisfaction.

In *Female Fist* by Kajsa Dahlberg we hear the words of a member of a lesbian collective but we do not see her face. In fact, apart from the opening and closing street scene and the English subtitles, we see nothing apart from the light around the lens cap, which Dahlberg left on while filming in order to protect the woman's anonymity. The woman she interviews discusses the production of a porn film, by and for a separatist lesbian community. *Female Fist* explores the adoption of invisibility by minority groups as a strategy for eluding state surveillance and control.

While the separatist politics that inform the film's production might suggest a closing down and policing of identities, Dahlberg points to the liberating potential of collectively-made and distributed erotica. Rather than picturing the speaker, which would narrow down the focus to a specific individual and countercultural project, Dahlberg is interested in the broader explorations that emerge from particular responses. The closed nature of this community, "could not be an end

<sup>26</sup>

Angus Cameron, "Getting Rid of Goldin+Senneby," email to the author, July 1, 2014.

<sup>27</sup>

Marti Manen and Job Ramos, "Interview with Kajsa Dahlberg," [www.zerom3.net](http://www.zerom3.net), 2006, accessed July 7, 2014.

in itself, but rather, function as a way to actually open up space for yourself and others; a way to be discussing what you want for yourselves." It could prompt questions about "What images could be produced, while struggling to avoid recognition as such?"<sup>27</sup>

Interiority and withdrawal are key tropes in the work of Becky Beasley. Her works in the exhibition draw inspiration from the Turin apartment of the architect and designer Carlo Mollino (1905-1973), an interior that he secretly designed and obsessively photographed towards the end of his life, but never lived in. Hints, fragments, dimensions from designs by Mollino for objects and interiors, some built and some unrealized, provide clues for Beasley's working method. She also draws inspiration from Mollino's writings, including his 1949 book about photography, *Message from the Darkroom*. Reflecting the influence of one artist's work on another, these pieces evoke the contradictory impulses to open out and hold back.

Beasley has discussed how the concept of "getting rid of ourselves" relates to the ego. She creates space for other artists in her work, staging her affiliation with them. Her process is at once reciprocal and hermetic. She works with and through other texts and artworks, but in ways that often remain elusive. Thomas Bernhard has been an important model, notes Beasley. "He, like I, found alter egos very useful for his own development as a writer. So Glenn Gould became an important figure through which Bernhard was able to work out his own ideas. So Bernhard, so Beasley, Bernhard, Gould."<sup>28</sup>

Jesse Darling's work for the exhibition takes the form of a tribute song. *Darling's Room [Karaoke Vape Version RAW]*, is an adaptation of "Marvins Room" by the R&B singer

28

Becky Beasley, email to the author, July 1, 2014.

Drake. Darling appears onscreen, sporting a hoodie and headphones, smoking an e-cigarette, dancing, voguing, posing and pouting. She sings along silently as lyrics scroll, karaoke-style, across the bottom of the screen. Drake's original song follows the arc of a drunken call to an ex-lover from a nightclub. Transposing her remake to the hipster art scene, a bored and tipsy Darling texts her ex; her messages are alternatively cocky and vulnerable. "Listen if i had a dick i'd send you dick pix...I know everything I touch/come crumbling down." Just as "everyone wanting a piece of JD" at the art party, Darling's text messages become another forum for the staging of self, at once heartfelt and profoundly alienated. Darling's remake is one of many amateur and professional versions of "Marvins Room" available on YouTube. Identifying with the singer's performance of soft masculinity and emotional confusion, her homage presents Drake as a kind of queer folk hero. A live mic in the gallery encourages others to sing along and maybe add their own versions.

Where Michael Sanchez might well critique Darling, as well as Beasley and Claire Fontaine, for performing the kinds of affiliations that he considers symptomatic of network capitalism, I see something more generous at play. Through their generative projects of quotation, interpretation and adaptation, the artists free up their source material from the strangle-holds of privatization, competition and individualism, recoding them as communal property. In Darling's hypnotic dance and alternately strutting and tender lyrics, I see links with Jean Luc Nancy's exploration of unbounded subjectivity. "When the body politic is in abandon, it opens onto notions of the common, the open, the distributed. What is left is an irremediable scattering, a dissemination of ontological specks."<sup>29</sup>

29

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, 1993, quoted in Galloway and Thacker, *The Exploit*, *ibid*, p.111.

Bifo's bleak diagnosis of contemporary life in *The Soul at Work* ends on a more hopeful note. Drawing on the late work of Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, Bifo urges a new understanding of friendship that "means sharing a sense, sharing a view and a common rhythm: a common refrain (*ritournelle*):"<sup>30</sup> By recognizing our communality instead of competition, and collectivity instead of private ownership, Bifo argues that "a different understanding of wealth is possible, one that is not based on possession, but on enjoyment."<sup>31</sup>

Through tactics of delegation, diffusion and distribution, artistic projects in *Getting Rid of Ourselves* explore how desires and subjectivities can be directed away from work. In order to recover life's liberating vitality, we must stop treating our affective worlds and relationships as commodities. Only then can we halt work's steady seepage into our every moment and relationship, and allow ourselves to really get a life.

<sup>30</sup>

Bifo p.215.

<sup>31</sup>

Bifo 218-219.

## BECKY BEASLEY

Build, Night, 2012  
Three gelatin prints

Nolens Volens (i), 2011  
Matt gelatin silver prints, cedar, acrylic

Perinde Ac Cadaver, 2011  
Cedar, lacquer, glass

All works courtesy of  
Laura Bartlett Gallery, London



## ADRIAN BLACKWELL

Circles Describing Spheres, 2014

Plywood and steel  
Courtesy of the artist





## HEATH BUNTING

### Off the Shelf Identity, 2008

Mixed media including wallet with ID cards, key on chain, cellphone, pens, signature stamp, letters, and other documents.  
Courtesy of the artist



## KAJSA DAHLBERG

### Female Fist, 2006

Single channel video, 20 mins  
Courtesy of the artist



## JESSE DARLING

### Darling's Room [Karaoke Vape Version RAW], 2014

Single channel video, 5 mins 41  
Courtesy of the artist



## CLAIRE FONTAINE

### How many comrades, 2008 Freehand smoke trace on ceiling

### Passe-partout (Quebec), 2009

<http://www.lysator.liu.se/mit-guide/mit-guide.html>

<http://www.hackerethic.org>

<http://www.lockpicks.com>

<http://www.lockpicking101.com>

<http://www.gregmiller.net/locks/makelockpicks.html>

Hacksaw blades, bicycle spokes, key-rings, paper-clips, Allen keys, safety pins and hair pins

### Untitled (Tennis ball sculpture), 2008

Thirty-two used tennis ball containing various concealed objects

All works courtesy of the artist



Passive Liquidity Provider with  
Claes-Henrik Julander (strategic investor), 2013

Bound and sealed folder/book, foil print and watercolour  
on paper, wax seal  
Courtesy of the artists



Troika, 2013

002199616 (Identity Card)

002199341 (Identity Card)

002293264 (Identity Card)

70434567

(Slovene Democratic Party Membership Card)

70434582

(Slovene Democratic Party Membership Card)

70434566

(Slovene Democratic Party Membership Card)

5436 6100 2287 3623

(Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav on Mastercard)

5436 6100 2294 9761

(Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav on Mastercard)

5436 6100 2295 5545

(Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav on Mastercard)

Single channel video, 1 min

Perspex frame containing nine plastic cards

Courtesy of the artists

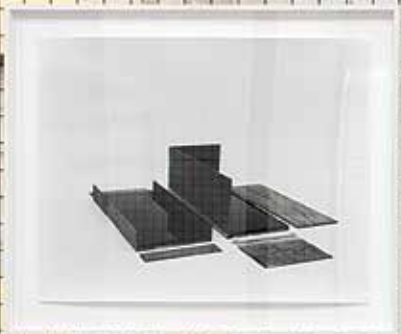


Enclosures, 2014

Steel mesh  
Courtesy of the artists









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## BIOGRAPHIES

**BECKY BEASLEY** is a London, U.K.-based artist whose work explores relationships between photography and objects, the body and interiority in a way that is highly subjective and yet developed through deep immersion in the thoughts and methods of other artists and writers. Literature is particularly generative for the artist, providing her own work with a place to start from and journey into. She graduated with an MFA from the Royal College of Art in 2002 and her recent solo exhibitions include *The Walk... in green* at Laura Bartlett Gallery, London (2014); *The Outside* at Tate Britain (2012) and Francesca Minini Gallery, Milan (2011); and *Setting* at Laura Bartlett Gallery, London (2012).

**ADRIAN BLACKWELL** is an artist, designer and urban theorist whose work focuses on the relationship between urban spaces and political/economic forces. He has been a visiting professor at Harvard University and is a full-time faculty member at the University of Waterloo. Blackwell is also a founder and editor of the journal *Scapegoat: Architecture / Landscape / Political Economy*.

**HEATH BUNTING** is a Bristol, U.K.-based artist whose work focuses on the development of open democratic communication systems and social structures on the Internet and in the public space. He came from the street up, passing through (and often revisiting) graffiti, performance, intervention, pirate radio, fax / mail art and BBS systems to become an active participant in the explosion of the Internet. He is co-founder of net.art and has created many accredited works. Bunting's work often explores the porosity of borders, both in physical space and online.

**KAJSA DAHLBERG** is a Berlin-based artist who has exhibited internationally and studied at the Whitney Independent Study Programme. Several of her projects focus on questions of anonymity and collective subjectivities. In *Female Fist*, 2006, a video about lesbian feminist porn makers, the filmmakers' voices, but not their faces, appear. For *A Room of One's Own: A Thousand Diaries*, 2006, Dahlberg created a palimpsest from copies of Virginia Woolf's 1929 book in the Swedish library system. By layering the pages on top of one another, Dahlberg almost submerges the printed text with readers' marginal comments and annotations.

**JESSE DARLING**, a London, UK-based artist, works between performance, installation and the Internet. She has made work for Tumblr and Facebook that explores the Internet as a space for self-fashioning, performance and viral proliferation. She has also performed and exhibited in galleries, including a solo show at London's Arcadia\_Missa in 2012. She received her MFA from the Slade School of Art.

**CLAIRE FONTAINE** is a Paris-based collective artist, "founded" in 2004. After lifting her name from a popular brand of school notebooks, Claire Fontaine declared herself a "readymade artist." Her practice interrogates the political impotence and the crisis of singularity that seem to define contemporary art today. But if the artist herself is as displaced, deprived of its use value, and exchangeable as the products she makes, there is always the possibility of the "human strike." Claire Fontaine uses her freshness and youth to make herself a whatever-singularity and an existential terrorist in search of subjective emancipation. She grows up among the ruins of the notion of authorship, experimenting with collective protocols of production, détournements, and the production of various devices for the sharing of intellectual and private property. Recent selected solo exhibitions include *Tears*, The Jewish Museum, NY (2013); 1493, Espacio 1414, San Juan, Puerto Rico (2013); and *Sell Your Debt*, Queen's Nails, San Francisco (2013).

**GOLDIN+SENNEBY** is a framework for collaboration set up by Swedish artists Simon Goldin and Jakob Senneby. Since 2004 they have deployed forms of performative and delegated activity to examine legal, economic and spatial constructs. They have made projects for institutions including Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm; Kadist Foundation, Paris; and the Power Plant, Toronto. For their *Headless* project, Goldin+Senneby explore the notion of "offsite" in financial, aesthetic and political terms.

**JANEZ JANŠA** is a conceptual artist, performer and producer living in Ljubljana, Slovenia. In 2007, together with Janez Jansa and Janez Janša, he changed his name to that of the Slovenian right-wing Prime Minister. The three artists' collective work has strong social connotations and is characterized by an inter-media approach. He is the author of numerous videos, performances, installations and new media works which have been presented in several exhibitions, festivals and lectures around the world. He is the director of the film *My Name Is Janez Janša*, co-founder and director of Aksioma – Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana and artistic director of the Aksioma | Project Space ([aksioma.org](http://aksioma.org)).

**JANEZ JANŠA** is an conceptual artist, writer, performer and director of interdisciplinary performances. In 2007, together with Janez Jansa and Janez Janša, he changed his name to that of the Slovenian right-wing Prime Minister. The three artists' collective work has strong social connotations and is characterized by an inter-media approach. His socio-political work is focused on relationships between art, society and politics. He is author of the book *Jan Fabre: La Discipline du chaos, le chaos de la discipline*, Armand Colin, Paris 1994; and was editor in chief of *Maska: The Performing Arts Journal*, from 1999 to 2006. He is the director of Maska, Institute for Publishing, Production and Education based in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

**JANEZ JANŠA** is a visual artist, working in the cross section of traditional visual art practices, conceptual art and new media. In 2007, together with Janez Jansa and Janez Janša, he changed his name to that of the Slovenian right-wing Prime Minister. The three artists' collective work has strong social connotations and is characterized by an inter-media approach. In 2003 he represented Slovenia at 50th Venice Biennial. Selected exhibitions include the Sao Paolo Biennial, Prague Biennial and Limerick Biennial ([zigakariz.com](http://zigakariz.com)).

**KERNEL** is an art collective founded in 2009 by architect Peggy Zali and artists Petros Moris and Theodoros Giannakis. They live and work between Athens and London. Their practice develops at the intersection of critical research, art, architecture and curating. Kernel has presented solo projects at SPACE, London 2013 and XYZ Outlet, Athens 2011. Selected group exhibitions include *Afresh*, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens; *V22 Young London*, V22, London; and the *3rd Athens Biennale – Monodrome*, Diplareios School, Athens. They have organized curatorial projects such as *Word of Mouth* for the 3rd Athens Biennale, Athens; *THE PUBLIC SCHOOL* in Athens; *BYOB* London, The Woodmill, London; and *Full/Operational/Toolbox*, M21, Athens ([kerneloperations.com](http://kerneloperations.com)).

**HELENA RECKITT** is a critic and curator based in London, U.K. She was Senior Curator of Programmes at the Power Plant in Toronto from 2006 to 2010 and since 2011 has been Senior Lecturer in Curating at Goldsmiths, University of London. Currently Reckitt is co-editing a special issue of the *Journal of Curatorial Studies* with Jennifer Fisher on Curating and the Affective Turn, and working with art historian Catherine Grant to develop the group exhibition *O Sister, O Shadow*.

## OPENING EVENTS

Wednesday, July 16

6:30 p.m.

### CLAIRE FONTAINE ON 1970S ITALIAN FEMINISMS AND THE HUMAN STRIKE

presented in partnership with  
the Consulat général de France à Toronto  
Room 190/Auditorium  
100 McCaul St.

8 to 10 p.m.

### OPENING RECEPTION

Onsite [at] OCAD University  
230 Richmond St. W.

## MORE EVENTS at Onsite [at] OCAD U

Saturday, July 19, 1 p.m.

### CURATOR'S TALK WITH HELENA RECKITT

Sunday, July 20, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

### ARTISTS SURVIVAL WORKSHOP LED BY HEATH BUNTING UNDER THE AEGIS OF [irational.org](http://irational.org)

In this workshop, practical woodland and shoreline survival skills will be examined and contrasted with both urban street-level and office survival strategies. Participants will explore techniques of sourcing clean water, fire, food, shelter and weapons.

The workshop builds on Heath Bunting's extensive experience of surviving as an artist on the margins of social and technological surveillance and control.

Tuesdays, 6 to 8 p.m. (August 5, August 19, September 2, September 16)

### LET'S GET LOST – A WALKING / READING GROUP FOCUSED ON THE DISMANTLING OF SUBJECTS AND SPACES

Hosted by Scapegoat: Architecture/Landscape/Political Economy  
Led by Adrian Blackwell and Marcin Kedzior

Meet at Onsite Gallery, 230 Richmond St. W.  
To receive the readings please email [onsite@ocadu.ca](mailto:onsite@ocadu.ca)

Responding to the proposition that we 'get rid of ourselves', this biweekly walking/reading group explores the spatial construction of subjectivity. Discussions focus around selected articles that highlight the contradictory values of individual freedom and private property underpinning the principle of the autonomous modern subject, and their current manifestations under Neoliberalism. Adapted from the Walking / Reading Group on Participation devised by Ania Bas and Simone Mair in London in 2013.

August 5

### THE ORIGINS OF PROPERTY IN LIBERAL INDIVIDUALISM

Brett Neilson and Sandro Mezzadra, *Fabrica Mundi: Producing the World by Drawing Borders*; Shiri Pasternak, *Property in Three Registers*.

August 19

### PRECARIOUS ACTORS OF NEOLIBERAL URBANIZATION

Irmgard Emmelhainz, *The Mexican Neoliberal Conversion and Differentiated, Homogenous Lives*; AbdouMalik Simone, *Water, Politics and Design in Jakarta*.

September 2

### OPENED BY THE WORLD

Georges Bataille, *The Economy Equal to the Universe*; Jane Bennett and Alexander Livingston, *Philosophy in the Wild: Listening to Things in Baltimore*; Jesse Boon, *Kids on Buildings: Echos, Mirrors, and Ghosts*.

September 16

### COMMONISM, OR CARING WITH OTHERS

Wendy Jacob and Gina Badger, *In the Presence of Another Being*; Paige Sarlin, *Vulnerable Accumulation: A Practical Guide*; Isabelle Stengers and Erik Bordeleau, *The Care of the Possible*.

Wednesday, September 24, 6:30 p.m.

**INSITE EXHIBITION TOUR WITH  
PAULETTE PHILLIPS**

OCAD U faculty, Integrated Media

Paulette Phillips is an artist and educator based in Toronto. Currently she is creating an archive of artist portraits using a polygraph, a camera and series of questions that frame the basis of self-representation.

Wednesday, October 1, 6:30 p.m.

**INSITE EXHIBITION TOUR WITH  
JIM DROBNICK**

OCAD U faculty, Liberal Arts & Sciences

JIM DROBNICK is a critic, curator and Associate Professor of Contemporary Art and Theory at OCAD U. He has published on the visual arts, performance, the senses and post-media practices, and is the co-editor of the *Journal of Curatorial Studies*.

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Consulat général de France à Toronto and Toronto Arts Council for their generous support; Anca Rojoiu for her provocative question; Dave Dymont and Roula Partheniou and Tess Takahashi and Mike Zryd for hospitality; Ania Bas and Simone Mair for permission to adapt the Walking/ Reading Group on Participation; Onsite Advisory Board and Barbara Fischer and Heather Darling Pigat of the University of Toronto Art Centre

## PARTICIPANTS

Ju-Hye Ahn, Rouzbeh Akhbari, Suzanne Andrews, Ana Barajas, Laura Bartlett, Becky Beasley, Adrian Blackwell, Heath Bunting, Kajsa Dahlberg, Jesse Darling, Sabrina De Bellefeuille, Rafaela Dražić, Jim Drobnick, Claire Fontaine, Goldin+Senneby, Sonja Grdina, Spencer Hatch, Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Ivan Jurakic, Marcin Kedzior, Kernel, Larissa Kostoff, Lola Landekic, Marcela Okretič, Paulette Phillips, Helena Reckitt, Charlie Roberts, Lisa Deanne Smith, Sara Teardo, Pallavi Thampi, Quentin Vercetty, Maya Wilson, Katharina Worf

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Kernel

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## GRAPHIC DESIGN

Rafaela Dražić

## LOCATION

Onsite [at] OCAD U Gallery  
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416-977-6000, Ext. 2208  
onsite@ocadu.ca  
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KERNEL

JULY 16 TO  
OCTOBER 11,  
2014

Onsite [at] OCAD U Gallery  
230 Richmond West



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