

## **GB11 Curatorial QA – Above and Below the Ground**

**Curatorial conversation with Margarida Mendes, Fernando Garcia-Dory, and Gunilla Klingberg**

Margarida Mendes: In the context of GB11, your works pertain to the strand “above and below ground,” which encompasses various projects on struggles over land, natural resources, and the faculties of the earth. Over the last few years there has been a crescent resurgence of artistic work that is invested in the politics of territories and space. Both artists and activists have been rethinking how contemporary modes of living are entangled with material resources and their chains of distribution. How do you think that this ecosystemic thinking is reflected in your practice?

Fernando Garcia-Dory: I am embedded in those questions in my practice. Basically, I am taking from different disciplines to see our relation to territories and their life forms, and land-based social and economic systems, and cultural forms that could ground them. Here are some lines on the *Inland* (2010–ongoing) project I have been developing, for which we’ll be working for the next three years with scientists, artists, shepherds and so on, and focusing as a case study on a model experimental village we are recovering.

*Inland* is a project and organization that examines the roles of territories, geopolitics, culture, anthropic ecosystems, and identity between city and countryside, and art and agriculture, in Europe today. It offers a platform for reflection, exchange, and action for artists, farmers, rural development agents, policy-makers, curators, and art critics.

A new relationship with our territories has to be established in order to facilitate the transition of our societies to sustainability. There is a reservoir of knowledge in rural areas that may be crucial for this. That legacy has to be revised and reinvented in order to open an inclusive space for new forms of co-living, alternative economies, and identities. Art can elaborate on the current situation by exposing potentials and menaces, and visions for the future. *Inland* aims to experiment with and evaluate the effectiveness of a potentially nurturing relationship between artists and rural spaces. Eventually this necessary conversation would evolve into social and economical aggregates of both cultural and land workers.

It began with a three-year period, 2010–13, taking Spain as a first case study and including an international conference, training workshops for artists to work in rural areas, and an artistic production stage in which twenty-two artists worked in the same number of villages. It was followed by exhibitions and a public forum that ignited an open debate about the place of rural spaces and art in society. Study groups and a publishing house have been also created.

In its current phase, *Inland* is extending its methodology to other European contexts, such as the countryside in Italy, Finland, the United Kingdom, and especially the Netherlands. It is also advising the European Commission's European Network for Rural Development on the potential of art in rural development processes. At the same time that *Inland* is working internationally, aiming to question EU policies regarding the rural and propose possible scenarios for territorial organization and the future of the art, it is also working at the micro-scale, recovering an abandoned village to become the organization's headquarters and community-of-practice.

Gunilla Klingberg: Rather than emerging from a specific geopolitical topic, curiosity is often my starting point in my practice – focusing on the common, generic, egalitarian, and universal things that link people and sites together. And from there one might find a link to contemporary modes of living, material resources and their chains of distribution, and politics of territories. For instance, my installation *Cosmic Matter* at the Istanbul Biennial (2007) reflected on the outsourcing of the moon. Throughout history the moon has been a powerful mythological symbol. I was triggered by this ancient image of recognition visible to everyone. In late 2006, NASA announced the Global Exploration Strategy project which included plans to construct a moon base and, in short, colonize the moon. The declaration involved selling the moon's natural resource Helium-3 to private enterprise, which would invalidate the almost thirty-year-old UN treaty that reaffirms the importance of a strictly peaceful use of the moon, asserting that it should be used solely for the benefit of the international community at large, not an individual actor. Mining the lunar surface would also change the visible lunar landscape as we know it.

MM: Also there is a growing tendency to recover material histories that have other notions of time, or tempo. The rejection of the big metropolis has been replaced by a more conscious approach to matter and other kinds of attention towards metabolic processes and cultures. What material histories are you interested in?

GK: My works evolve from a quite pragmatic approach where I often use the material that is available and present on site and connects to the location. Some of my works have dealt with

viral aspects of visual language and our collective unconscious in the realm of contemporary consumer culture. I am interested in the everyday mundane and traces of our individual daily routines in the private sphere and the urban landscape, as well as more ephemeral matters and cosmic forces like moon cycles and tides. Symbols, signs, patterns, and repetitions, specifically their transcendental, spiritual, and psychedelic use. I am intrigued by folklore and folk belief, astrology, spiritual rituals, and the borderland between the intuitive and the rational, between pseudoscience and science – like geophysical subtle Earth energies, suggesting a possible alternative experience of the environment and space.

The spatial installation *Parallelareal* (2010–16) is a visualization based on the global grid of geophysical invisible Earth energy lines known as Curry lines which, according to dowsers, covers the entire planet with an all-encompassing grid. Recently I had the opportunity to meet with the architecture professor and Feng Shui specialist Dr. Cho from Seoul who explained more about the Korean Feng Shui – *Pungsu* – and its notions of reading the landscape, which I found fascinating and very interesting in relation to this occidental grid system.

FGD: Science builds its object by removing it from its complex environment into artificial, noncomplex experimental situations. Science is not the study of an inherently simple universe, it is a heuristically necessary simplification to obtain certain properties, and observe laws. In *Seven Complex Lessons in Education for the Future* (2002) Edgar Morin points to disjunction, false rationality, reductionism, and closed specialization as essential problems that challenge our ability to generate pertinent knowledge in general.

The modern pathology of spirit lies in the hyper-simplification that blinds us to the complexity of the real. The pathology of reason is the rationalization that encloses the real in a coherent ideas system, but it is partial and unilateral, unaware that part of the real is non-reasonable, and that rationality has as its mission to open a dialogue with the non-reasonable.

Morin continued further: “I feel that the true rationality is deeply tolerant with mysteries. False rationality was always considered as primitive, childish, pre-logic, (irrational), populations where there was a complexity of thought, not only in the technique, in the knowledge of nature, but also in the myths.”

This statement grounds ethno-ecology, a discipline integrated in agroecology. It studies how peasant and indigenous peoples develop a cognitive and material appropriation of

ecosystems by having a *kosmos* (beliefs as image, or representation), *corpus* (knowledge as reading, or interpretation) and *praxis* (practices as uses, or managements). These three interrelated aspects define the relations between society and nature.

The recognition of complexity and the value of peasant knowledge and creativity informs agroecology, a scientific framework of the new paradigm, made of many disciplines such as ecological economy and environmental sociology. It is directly oriented to action, its aims are to rescue and revalorize traditional knowledge, promote economic, social, and cultural equity and justice, promote participation and organizational processes for self-management and empowerment of communities, and merge social and natural science methodologies for endogenous rural development. How can art operate from an agroecological perspective?

MM: Both your practices deal with preoccupations that touch the planetary scale on distinct levels, while raising questions about operating methodologies, such as agroecology in *Inland*, or Korean Pungsu and ley lines. There seems to be a regained sense of urgency or need for one's attunement with the cycles of nature and rhythms of the cosmos. How do you think this translates in your practice, and society in general, at this particular moment in time?

FGD: The moment we are living in is one of restructuring financial global capitalism. Aspects of accumulated debt, increasing inequality, incomprehensibly complex and fast algorithmic financial trading, as well as the effects of fossil-fuel dependency and the depletion of renewable and non-renewable natural resources and biodiversity, are evidence that the parasitic forms of profiting from Earth's systems, as well as within our societies, are provoking a progressive disintegration. In this passage, social unrest and political turbulence appears: it's very clear, for example, if we follow how severe drought related to global warming sparked the Syrian civil war, and how the subsequent refugee crisis related to Brexit and the rise of the far-right in the West. The system can then evolve into different scenarios of more sudden or gradual collapse, followed by dystopian regressive regimes or, perhaps, a new opportunity for a post-capitalist, more emancipatory system. The role I see for the artist, and what I try in my practice, is to generate negentropic, resilient models of social assemblages with ecosystems that can eventually become replicable seeds and references for socio-ecological restructuring. I try to be operative both in symbolic representation as well as in functional, useful, applied creativity for setting up those other life systems. I don't believe the artist can any longer afford to have a solely studio

aesthetic practice without reinventing the context of production, distribution, and consumption of culture.

GK: In the work *A Sign in Space* (2012, one of the *Sense and Sustainability* series of commissions in the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve, Spain) my intention was to tune in with the lunar and tidal rhythm. A graphic star pattern was impressed as a relief on the sand of the beach during low tide. As the tide rose, the pattern gradually disappeared. The pattern was composed with fragments of truck tires, mounted on a cylindrical steel template and attached to the beach cleaner's tractor, like a parasite. Following the lunar and tidal calendar, the pattern was remade across the beach at every possible low tide when the tidal calendar was synchronized with the early-morning working schedule of labor, modulating two different time strata.

Regarding your question about society in general, today I think this urgent environmental situation generates an increased eco-awareness at a small, local scale, with experiments in sustainable living, but at the same time the ongoing large-scale exhaustion of natural resources could also cause a paralyzing anxiety. Perhaps that thought leads to my works in which spirituality and the New Age movement have been an essential element in their capacity to be an apparent paradox, as well as suitable complements to an accelerating Western consumer culture.

MM: There seems to be an ongoing concern with alternative forms of currency and knowledge production – from the structuring of particular community ecologies (Fernando) to the investigation of the realms of the energetic (Gunilla). Forms of transaction are crucial to the constituency and mutability of matter and to the way we relate to territories and nature itself. What is your interest in alternative forms of currency?

GK: None of my works deals with currencies in particular. But perhaps if one would translate it into another frequency – a flow of energy – not necessarily with a market value, then I am focusing on spiritual, cultural, and existential values as well as self-sustained systems. For the Biennale one of my new works is an illuminated sign charged by solar panels and thus disconnected from the electricity network. I am also working on a series of sun prints, cyanotypes, made at local fortune-tellers, *sajus*, and shamans' storefronts in Gwangju. I am intrigued by fortune-telling systems which in various ways are concerned with cosmic energy, and which connect astrological patterns with more mundane activities and life energy. I prepared the light-sensitive paper, mixing the raw chemicals and coating the paper sheets in a format

suitable for fieldwork. By placing the paper on the inside of a window facing the sun, a direct imprint – a shadow image – of its signs and adornments was made. The window itself interests me as a portal and passage of light and energy, and as a membrane between the inner and outer.

The sun-exposure time through the windows was one hour to fifteen hours long, a slow process in real time creating a certain state of waiting, an occasion for conversation and at some points consultancy. The exposure time is also in a way documenting that specific moment in time. Cyanotype is a photographic method for making reproductions of technical drawings as well as scientific illustrations of botanical plants, invented in the mid-19th century. Using two iron compounds instead of silver, blueprint imprints could be made at low cost repeatedly, like an early predecessor to the photocopier at the dawn of reproduction, but today quite useless in terms of mass production and distribution. However, transformed from one condition to another, now the experience itself of that very slow process could be considered the magic.

FGD: I am interested in the cultural currency of a given intervention within the established art system. It is important to understand the way the existing art system – with its codes and influences – structures, categorizes, and legitimates proposals, especially in regard to culture production. There have been aesthetics and formal languages that embodied and solidified ideas and values, from Paleochristianity against the Classical period, to Romanticism or even Pop. In this sense the currency of a cultural proposal has to be legitimized by the existing art system while looking beyond it.

With any artistic production we raise the cultural currency of a certain value or concept – so it will eventually become a shared place for society to meet. Art is then vector and catalyzer of social change or immobilism. Playing in-between the established mechanisms that attribute value and currency to an art proposal, and questioning those mechanisms themselves, the artist stays on unstable ground with possible unexpected turns of co-option by capitalism – what are the implications for the Bauhaus project of accessible, geometric, domestic simplicity and for the Social-Democratic anti-classism ideals having somehow birthed the multinational giant Ikea? This demands a constant reorientation of efforts, or as Karen Barad would say, it is an ongoing play of in/determinacies.