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Post-Autonomy on-line
From David Goldenberg  http://www.postautonomy.co.uk/blog

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An invitation for you to participate in a project looking at the relationship of an audience to the space of art, and the future of art by answering some questions and/or taking part in a discussion.

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0. Introduction

Currently my project, “Move into the domain of Post-Autonomy” is being exhibited in the group show “Jump into Cold Water”, curated by Sonke Gau and Katharina Schlieben, at the Shedhalle, Zürich, Switzerland until the 30th July 2006.  
http://www.shedhalle.ch/dt/presse/index.shtml

“Move into the domain of Post-Autonomy” is an on-line project located on the Post-Autonomy web site; comprising text, questions, a schedule of daily on-line discussions, which will be updated and changed throughout the exhibition.  
http://www.postautonomy.co.uk/blog

I have proposed to the Shedhalle that the next phase of this project, which is planned to take place during July, will take the form of a collaborative debate. A debate that proposes to focus on issues that start by examining what is commonly understood as an “Audience for art”, the relationship between an audience and Art, extending an Audience’s Autonomy in Art, leading onto a discussion looking at developing an Art for the future. 

For this to take place I am asking a selection of people for their views on these topics.

1. Participating in the project if you want to take part.

I have devised a series of questions and would very much appreciate you taking the time to answer them. These questions and subsequent answers will be made available to the public on the Post-Autonomy website and will remain online for the duration of the “Jump into Cold Water” exhibition. Below I have made a few suggestions of the form your responses may take, but if you have any other ideas or suggestions please feel free to use them.

Practicalities

a) If you agree to take part please make sure to include your name so that you will be fully credited.
b) You can email your responses to [EMAIL PROTECTED]
c) Locate material on the PA website yourself.
d) Or you can book time to talk about your answers and any other issues in the PA chat room.

To locate material on the website will only take a few minutes. To do this you will need to go to the PA homepage,  http://www.postautonomy.co.uk/blog  enter a user name and apply for a password, which will be sent back to your email automatically. Once you have this, enter both your user name and password and you will be able to add your material to the site. A space for your content will be clearly visible on the homepage.

If you want to discuss issues raised by this information sheet in more depth or open up a discussion topic of your own, you can book a time to talk about these in the PA website chat room with myself or anyone else who enters the chat room. I can usually be found in the chat room from Monday–Friday between 6-7 BST.
2) Introduction to Questions

Expanding the role of an audience in Art as a point of departure for making changes in Art

Examining the role of an audience in Art is much more than a question of how to reach new or untapped consumers, it is also much more than the fashionable cynical use of an audience as free labour. Nevertheless how is it possible to address and rethink the issue of an Audience in Art in its complexity, in a manner that allows the possibility to break through the current dead end, and that over comes the suggestion that the problem of an audience for Art is already solved? In the quest to develop ideas for making changes in Art it is, I think, important to start by looking at ungluing and renegotiating these existing positions in Art. By “positions” I understand this to mean recognition of those persons who want to take part in Art, as opposed to those persons who ought to take part, and who is and who is not allowed entrance into Art to take part. This is what is understood as the Politics of Art. And when I discuss ideas for change I specifically refer to the possibility for making alterations or improvements to a Euro-centric Art tradition, and when I refer to an end of Art, or an end or development of aesthetic Autonomy, again it is in specific reference to the construction of this Euro-centric Art tradition. We can take that further by looking at breaking the link between this model of Art and its symbolic role in promoting the expansion of Western values.

Entry points into the questions

A point of departure for the project must start by looking at whether there is a realistic possibility for freeing up and renegotiating the space of what is recognised as the space of the Audience, in order for the audience to acquire an extended role.

I therefore want to start with the following preliminary questions as a guide for you to enter the project.
How should any audiences contribution to a project be acknowledged?

What constitutes an audience for Art?
What is an audience in Art?
What is the role an audience plays in shaping an Art event?
How does an audience acquire information about Art?
Should an audience be interested in expanding their role? And if they do in what way do you think this is possible and how do they do this effectively? What system requires to be put in place to assist an audience to be able to do this?
(If you want to address any of these questions specifically please do)

These concerns, I think you will agree, are of interest to many of us.

For a non specialised audience to begin to engage with these issues and go onto make an informed decision within the space of Art, a system of acquiring a body of specialist knowledge and concepts, and learning about art through a working channel for communicating is obviously necessary, and this is what I want to look at putting into practice during this project. But having said, please note, that I have out of necessity tried to cut out as much specialist language as I can, by falling back to familiar terms that a general audience understands, but they are not necessarily the terms I would employ in describing the field of Post Autonomy, which I hope doesn’t lead to further misunderstandings!

Changing a Euro-centric tradition of art

An audience’s Autonomy

What I would like to ask you next are a number of questions about what you think about Art
today; whether you think there is a realistic possibility for its development or change, including the expansion of the role of the audience and the space for an audience to make decisions about the shape of any Art practice. This can be described as an audience’s “Autonomy in Art”. Development of an audience’s Autonomy in Art can also be understood as its “Post-Autonomy”, through expanding beyond a standard or normalised idea of Autonomy.

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Bureau for research into Post-Autonomy, Post-Autonomy on-line, and the Post-Autonomy website, established 2006

What is Post-Autonomy?

The debate and understanding of Post-Autonomy, which is in its infancy, is proposed as another way of thinking and staging contemporary culture. A debate that taps into and builds on recent research carried out by the theorists and philosophers Luhmann, Lingner and Ranciere, into the history of the invention of contemporary Art, or what is more correctly understood as a Euro-centric art tradition. This research examines the physical make up that embodies this tradition, in order to then go onto staging a fundamental rethinking into how that tradition has been translated and transmitted. All agree that our current understanding of this tradition is seriously flawed and that a complete rethinking is required. Key to this revision and rethinking revolves around the notion of Aesthetic Autonomy, and here these authors can be seen to belong to the tradition that opens up and expands any closed or restricted reading of Aesthetic Autonomy, including how and where it is applied. This process of how we rethink, reinvent, expand or go beyond Autonomy is what we understand as Post-Autonomy; this reading of Post-Autonomy feeds into Political Sciences concrete example and understanding of Post-Autonomy as the completion or conclusion of a Nation States Autonomy. Since this moment allows for the fundamental revision of all aspects of how we rethink and stage a contemporary cultural practice, it can also be seen as a moment that coincides with developing a new model for the future of art, a new model, which we have termed Post-Autonomy.

Recently 16 Beaver Group described Post Autonomy as follows:

“Post-Autonomous art describes a mode of making art at a time when the artist’s presumed autonomy has become rather problematic. A post-autonomous mode of production is no longer concerned with creating singular works of art attributable to a particular artist or author. Instead, a post-autonomous art practice employs a collaborative or dialogical mode of production, for example, via face-to-face or on-line dialogues, conversations or events, wiki’s, salons, bulletin boards, chat rooms, or collaborative visual editing environments.

The aim of post-autonomous artistic production is not (or not primarily) to create objects (electronic or physical) or to document the traces of the productive process. Rather, it is to support and embody a political transformation whereby the human participants subscribe to an open ended mutual learning process and define and activate a productive space outside capitalism and its competitive mode of production.”

Ola Stahl of Ccred has written:

In relation to the post-autonomy project, the comment was made that the project raises a significant question: What is a concept? How does a concept operate? Referring specifically to the notion of post-autonomy, for instance, is it meant to be an art historical concept (used to group together and define a number of practices as being post-autonomous), or is it an ‘inventive’ concept (i.e. is it used to crack open habitual practices of thought (and practice in itself) to open up to different parameters of cultural production/practice)?

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Questions

Introduction

An Audience's role in taking responsibility for shaping an Art of the future by building a new model that we understand as Post Autonomy.

Your contribution to this project can be seen to extend and test out how we understand Autonomy in Art, and in that respect develops a debate into understanding a notion of "Post-Autonomy". Through expanding the Autonomy of your role relocates you into a central position where you have the responsibility, if you wish to take up the challenge, for discussing how you can contribute to making fundamental changes to a normalised model of Art.

How do we understand this use of language in art?

I now want to make a number of tentative observations, concerning the form this language and questioning has taken so far, and where I think it is leading. And these have to be tentative since I want to see whether it is at last feasible to begin to pin down the characteristics of a recognisable language and inherent logic that allow us to understand this new and unexplored terrain of Post-Autonomy.

How can we characterise the logic of using language in art, the use of this form of questioning, the process of rethinking through all aspects of what we understand as a Euro-centric tradition of art, and how do we go onto understand this or a similar methodology transferred into the space of PA?

So far it is possible to make the following observations:

1. Use of language and questioning as a continuation of PA projects exploring the stripping down or away of formal and conceptual trappings of a Euro-centric tradition. (I do of course that this continues a reductive rather than additive form of developing a practice and system of building thinking, with all of its inherent problems, art historical ideologies and mythologies.) Working in a “gap” that bares no resemblance to any existing means of presenting, staging and thinking within the tradition of a Euro-centric tradition, but nevertheless allows the possibility of moving forward.
2. Recognising the end, or suspension, of this Euro-centric tradition.
3. Recognising a space where a language doesn't have to rely on the resources and logic of this Euro-centric tradition. Use of a type of language and questioning that allows for the possibility for rebuiding and navigating around the space of Post Autonomy. I understand this use of language inside PA, dislocated from its context and comprehension within a Euro-centric tradition, to full fill another role and function inside the space of PA, where language can be seen as more or less than language.

1) What is Autonomy?

In discussions looking into the future of art, in talks and texts into “Post-Autonomy” on the Post-Autonomy website, we start by asking ourselves what is Autonomy? In most people’s thinking the idea of Autonomy is linked to Democracy, freedom and Art. But when we try to put our thoughts into words it proves notoriously illusive and difficult to pin down exactly what Autonomy is. However, given that the issue of Autonomy is so significant, particularly it’s central role in any understanding of Contemporary Art, I would like to ask you:

1a) How, would you put into words and define your own idea of Autonomy?
1b) If you cannot do this maybe you can provide visual examples?
1c) But how useful is the continued application of the notion of Autonomy to our daily lives? Is there an alternative notion we can point too?
1d) Do you think an understanding of Autonomy in Art and Politics is equivalent? If it is, I now want to ask the following. If the notion of Autonomy is such a distant notion, and it is necessary to remember or recall what Autonomy is in order to think about Autonomy; and, if a recent reading of Autonomy can be linked to Western expansionism, Neo-Liberalism, and Neo-Liberalism’s
reading of freedom and Democracy, how useful is it to continue to apply this template of Autonomy to a changing, advanced understanding of contemporary culture?

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2) Art and Computers

Recently the debate into issues of Autonomy, freedom, open society, break down of positions and authorship etc has migrated to the web.

2a) Where do you think we can locate clear examples or evidence of Aesthetic Autonomy today, is it in a normalised art practice or the mythical open space of net art? 2b) Can you say something about how you think Autonomy works in net art or the web, and if possible show examples.

3) Rethinking how we understand art, developing a new model of Art, and an Art of the future.

By rethinking Autonomy and expanding the role of an audience’s Autonomy in Art, we start to think about new possibilities for Art, which is equivalent to thinking about an “Art of the future”. An “Art of the Future” is another method we can use to disengage from existing thinking and examples of normalised notion of Art by projecting outside or beyond this existing framework.

3a) In your opinion is this method of breaking, disrupting and forgetting how we think and stage Art now a useful way to start to look at developing a new idea of Art? If not what other process would you suggest? 3b) Again in your opinion is there a need, and is it realistic to rethink our understanding of art and develop a new model within today’s economic and cultural climate? 3c) If you have an opportunity of rethinking and reinventing Art what would you want in Art in the future?

4) How do we position this thinking about an Art of the future?

4a) Through developing a new model of Art, which we call “Post-Autonomy”, how do you think we can make sense of this thinking and research? 4b) If the project looks at developing a new model of Art, or a model of Art for the future, does it make sense to continue to recognise this thinking in relationship to a tradition of Art that the thinking is seeking to disengage from? 4c) Or, does it make sense to look at developing a different context for this thinking, in relationship to different debates, for instance debates into Globalisation, Post Colonial thinking, New Media and Net art, or none of these?

5) A language for a future Art practice.

5a) If this thinking and practice can be seen to break with the tradition of a Euro-centric practice en-route to establishing an Art of the future, what language do you suggest we tap into to articulate to make sense and open up this Art of the future?

6) The term Post-Autonomy

6a) How useful is the term or image of “Post-Autonomy” in signalling a new model of Art? 6b) The use of the term “Post-Autonomy” often triggers debate into the lack or loss of Autonomy in art (and peoples daily lives), so that the use of Post-Autonomy can be seen to define the actual existing conditions of un freedom in contemporary art. But the term can also be seen to suggest a moment and opportunity for setting out a set of ideas that could better embody the specificity of today’s cultural practice. In that respect the debate generated by PA can be seen as an opportunity to replace a weak notion with a notion generated by living, engaged practitioners that is specific to today’s conditions. In your view is this use of PA worth while, and if it is how do we go onto construct a better set of ideas for a contemporary cultural practice? 6c) Possibly Post Autonomy doesn’t hint at a new model, but instead could be seen to picture a new stage in the development of Capitalism, of the nation State, and even the virtual space of the web, ne
technologies, net art, which is sometimes recognised to embody notions of Capitalist space. Due you think this a better understanding of PA, and if it is can you place say why.

7) Please include here any other issues you think are useful to raise or you would like to discuss on the PA website.

If you require any further information to do with this project, or have constructive ideas on how to clarify any statements I have made, please feel free to contact me.

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4) Options for extending the debate

If you don’t want to respond to the questions or statements in the form of a questionnaire then please feel free to use this space to develop or sketch out an alternative idea

For example this could take the form of:

A programme of discussions on the PA chat room
Talks using skype
A web caste debate
Rewrite any part of the text in your own language and wording

Or any other form you think would be more appropriate