

The Applause Machine

An inquiry into Trojan Horseness

The Applause Machine

by Alban Karsten Bras

Abstract

This research, an inquiry into Trojan Horseness, examines different methods of intervention — hosting and infiltrating — as a creative practice in the public realm. It's a performative practice based upon the biology of *mutualism*: the way two parties exist in a relationship in which each individual benefits from the activity of the other. In other words, to see how much you need to give in order to get what you want.

The concept of the Trojan Horse is used as an analogy throughout the writing to frame the relation between appearance and a hidden agenda. Two methods for performing in an infiltrative practice — *the Advocate* and *the Imp* — are drawn to position the intention of the performer and the work arising therefrom.

The use of the conditions of labor, work and action in the performative practice is researched in this thesis to examine the role of an artist in a market based economy, and what performance and a labor-practice have in common.

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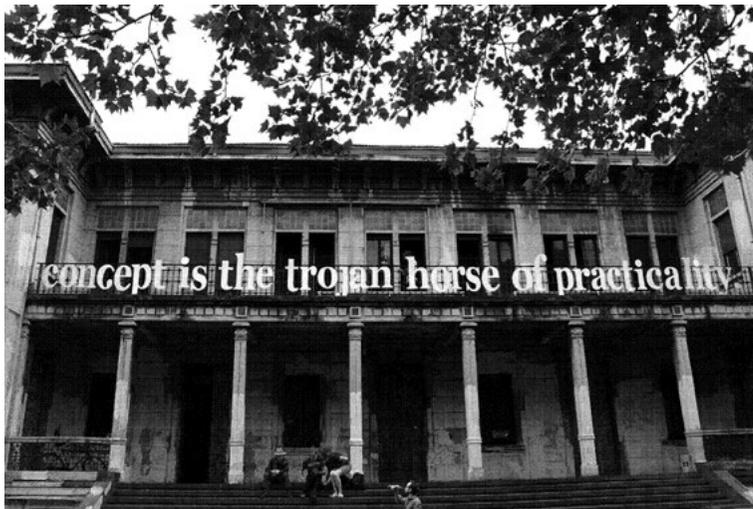
Acknowledgement

It has been quite a ride, the process of researching and writing this thesis. Although I managed to finish my research in a generally coherent piece, I am fully aware that this document reflects only a sediment of the three months spent investigating the subject.

I feel the urge to give some shout-outs to all the people who supported me intellectually, physically, spiritually and with their coffee.

First of all, I would like to thank Tom Kemp for proofreading my piece and questioning the parts that contained arguable logics. Foremost, I need to express my gratitude to Catherine Somzé, who kindly offered herself as lab rat for this period of time, where I could constantly bounce ideas off, and who showed a rare and sincere engagement in my subject. I need to especially thank Kitty Maria, who pointed out to me that while I didn't want to write about this subject in the first place, it was exactly the reason why I should.

I am indebted to all the writers, researchers and artists that I examined during the course of writing and where I borrowed a lot of ideas from. Without you this thesis would have had a completely different posture. Endorsing the words of John Giorno in the Ugo Rondinone piece *I ♥ John Giorno*: 'Thank you, thank you, thank you, thanks.'



Concept is the Trojan Horse of Practicality, by Assembly Hall (Yiannis Mouravas, Cyril Menouillard and Alban Karsten), M^AC^AO façade, Milan 2016.

INTRODUCTION

The Applause Machine: An inquiry into Trojan Horseness

‘Thou mayst believe me, gentle reader, without swearing, that I could willingly desire this book (as a child of my understanding) to be the most beautiful, gallant, and discreet that might possibly be imagined; but I could not transgress the order of nature, wherein everything begets his like’ (Cervantes 3).

In his opening words of the author’s preface of *Don Quixote*, Miguel Cervantes is describing that he could not, despite his earnest intentions, defy the laws of gravity, and therefore can merely create a self portrait that is not nearly as clever, gracious, layered and witty as he would have desired it to be. Not to be misunderstood as an excuse, Cervantes deploys these words as cheeky and self-deprecating, but also to immediately indicate a major theme of the book: the gap between beautiful dream and hard practice.

As if he’s breaking the fourth wall *avant la lettre*, Cervantes addresses the reader directly with the problematic semblance of his piece.¹ By tearing down the imaginative wall between the story and its reader, he infiltrates their private space of escapism, presenting his introductory words as a patient information leaflet.

By appropriating Cervantes’ words (Ctrl + c) and placing them into the context of my own writing,

¹ The fourth wall is a performance convention in which an invisible, imagined wall separates actors from the audience, used in theater, cinema and also in literature. Diderot introduced the concept of the fourth wall in *Discours sur la Poesie Dramatique* in 1758, while the first part of *Don Quixote* was published in 1605 (hence *avant la lettre*: a forerunner of something before that something was recognized and named).

I'm making an analogy with the outcome of my own process (Ctrl + v). This is an inquiry into Trojan Horseness. With the allegory of the Trojan Horse I sought to describe, analyze and compare different modes of infiltrations within the context of art — often taking place outside the conventional institutional art networks but resulting in an artwork. Next to infiltration, the act of hosting will be explored. While with infiltration the protagonist penetrates an existing framework without being invited to it, in hosting the Trojan Horse reverses the situation and becomes the inviting party by creating infrastructure to receive his guests in. In the bigger narrative of labor, purpose and function these investigation strategies are both ways of collecting a focused group of people around you to start operating in.

Beside examples of projects and publications of admirable (artistic) practices, I used my own previous projects and attempts, as well as their strategies and tactics as case studies to get a better understanding of my work in relation to the act of infiltration and hosting. Strategy and tactic are oftentimes my starting points of a soon-to-be conceived project. Strategy is the “what” part of the equation and helps to answer the question “What am I trying to achieve?”. After clarifying this initial issue, tactic comes in and lays down the “how”, in addition to accomplish the “what”. The ancient Greeks referred to tactics as the “art of arrangement”.

The structure of this research piece is essayistic in tone, reflecting a personal approach in style and organization of writing. Although my attitude in researching the course manner was analytical, the captured outcome became more intimate than the subject perhaps deserved in terms of the usual format of academic writing. I could not, in all honesty and without apologies, *transgress the order of nature, wherein everything begets his like.*

Yet do not worry. Through examples, imagery and (questionable) graphs, the thesis will present its patient and resourceful reader a handful of strategies, methods and models for potential future undertakings supplemented with the overarching notion of labor, work and action.

CHAPTER ONE

ONE.1

A personal history of Trojan Horseness

In 2009 I was obsessed by the website *Niburu.nl*, an anti-governmental platform with a collection of articles about conspiracies, UFO sightings and cover-ups. The site's name Niburu refers to a planet (Niburu/Nibiru²) that writer Zecharia Sitchin describes in *The 12th Planet*. In this book Sitchin talks about the origin of our species, based on translations of the approximately 6.000 year old Sumerian clay tablets. He — one of the key examiners and translators of the tablets — found great similarities between the Old Testament's Genesis and the clay tablets, with one major difference. The word "God" as we know it from the Bible is never used, the tablets only mention "Gods", or better: "Anunnaki". These Anunnaki were the habitants of the 12th planet called Nibiru. They traveled to earth around 450.000 years ago to get their hands on minerals, especially gold, as an important source they needed for their planet's eroding atmosphere. But after gold mining for a period, the unsatisfied Anunnaki worker bees turned to Enki, one of the highest ranked Anunnaki and referred to as the creator. To help out his exhausted fellow Anunnaki's, Enki decided to make one of his biggest creations: mankind.

*I will produce a lowly Primitive;
"Man" shall be his name.
I will create a Primitive Worker;
He will be charged with the service of the gods,
that they might have their ease. (Sitchin 87)*

² Nibiru or Niburu, there's no clear consensus on the planet's vowels. Some translators like Zecharia Sitchin call it Nibiru, others use the name Niburu, others just say "Planet X".

So, mankind was produced as a working breed. It all made so much sense to me. Apart from the creation narrative — which can be rendered symbolically or in a literal way — it was the inevitable condition of the human race as workers that I simply could not let go of.

Gaining this kind of obscure knowledge felt like the first step of unchaining myself. I wanted to join this collective, Niburu, that held occasional meetings in my hometown. Originally started as a UFO-front, Niburu was now a platform mainly concerned with conspiracy theories and governmental cover-ups. One of the biggest, health-threatening cover-ups of our time that caught my attention was the phenomenon Chemtrails, a trail sprayed in the air by airplanes that, other than your average airplane condensation trails, stay in the air much longer and contain damaging chemicals like particles of barium and aluminum.

I started examining all the articles placed on the Niburu website about Chemtrails knowing this would be my subject. I collected every article on the subject and after coming across a story on their website called *How to make a Chembuster?*, I started making my first Chembuster (see *Figure one.1.1* on the following page), a device loosely

based on the Cloudbuster of Wilhelm Reich.³ The technology of the Chembuster is a fairly loose and more basic adaptation of Reich's Cloudbuster and its production is manageable with home depot elements like copper tubing, wooden plates and a bucket, combined with less accessible materials as epoxy resin and double terminated quartz crystals.

I did not want to join the group just as a member, I wanted to join as an expert. I was no worker anymore, I wanted people to work with me or for me (There is a personal ambiguity in this, I will get there later).

So I went to one of the meetings in august, 2009, and waited afterwards for the main guy in charge of the platform. I introduced myself as a chemtrail expert and provided him with some subject-related knowledge I gained from his website. I also ensured him with a picture as proof that I was a successful Chembuster — like a Ghostbuster; the term is applied for the device as well as its user.

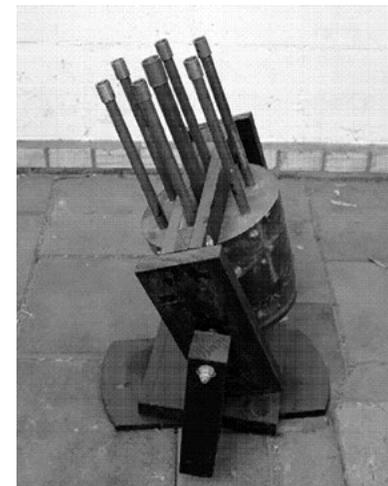
He hired me shortly after our conversation as a Chemtrail expert based on facts I served him that I had obtained from his own website. I was offered to do a lecture in the next Niburu edition, and a “How-to-build” workshop where we could

³ A cloudbuster is a pseudo-scientific device designed by Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957), which Reich said could produce rain by manipulating what he called “orgone energy” present in the atmosphere. The cloudbuster was intended to be used in a way similar to a lightning rod: focusing it on a location in the sky and grounding it in some material that was presumed to absorb orgone — such as a body of water — would draw the orgone energy out of the atmosphere, causing the formation of clouds and rain.

split the income. It started to slightly worry me that the guys who wrote and published so much on conspiracies were so easy to persuade. Had I made them believe me by blinding them with their own words? Or did they trust my words so firmly because they wanted them to be true?

That question aside, most importantly, mission succeeded: I got in. I successfully entered the core of an organization as an expert at the mere start of my career. I proofed myself to be more than a horse.

Figure one.1.1



At the top: A 1950's drawing of Wilhelm Reich's first cloudbuster. This is an inspiration for modern day chembuster-builders. At the bottom: My chembuster interpretation of his machine, built in a rotating and tilting framework. (Karsten, 2009, *the Year I Spent Fighting Chemtrails*)

ONE.2 Trojan tactics

As this episode were my first baby steps in the fine art of Trojan Horse infiltration, I found myself disillusioned quickly after entering. What now? I had no goal other than getting in, and with getting in I had already succeeded. I did not feel like hosting workshops and got suspicious by the doubtful meaning of gaining money (and splitting it) from the people that support you with their trust. I was entering but not ready to join.

So the Trojan Horse will surely need a bigger endurance than just getting into its ambioned destination. In order to become a successful infiltration, one must be ready to take on the moral and ethical codes of his focus group, in this case the UFO and Conspiracy platform. Only then it becomes possible to gain information about the organization's functioning in general and some of its obscure complexities and / or banalities.

The slightly sardonic idea(l) of the Trojan Horse is to penetrate a world (a position) and start functioning in it without being officially entitled to it through education, experience, knowledge or a position of privilege. The Trojan Horse is not invited to join the party, so it joins the party on its own initiative. When joined, the Trojan Horse starts to convert the situation into its desired trajectory. Its presence is something not to be denied, whereas the initial Trojan Horse was a huge sculpture. The Trojan Horse is not a spy doing its infiltration; it is there to be noticed. And because of the

somewhat grotesque presence of the form, which is so obviously out there to focus on, the content remains easily hidden. Referring to the historical Trojan Horse there are two elements to dissect:

1. The physical monument of promise
2. The hidden agenda

Where number 1 is referring to the wooden horse on wheels with its empty belly, number 2 would be the army that nests in this belly with their actual goal to penetrate and conquer the bastion of power.

In our field (let's say art and design which is ridiculous because of the heavy expansion towards other fields), the Trojan Horse takes on a role to surreptitiously become a researcher on human behavior and culture. In art, the act of infiltrating is often rhetorically transfigured into the more conventional term intervention, but infiltration in fact can be seen as the more ambiguous nephew of intervention art. Intervention art is a situation outside of the traditional art institutes in an attempt to change the existing conditions, where artists collaborate with galleries, museums, companies, communities, etc. For example, intervention art may attempt to change economic or political situations, or may attempt to make people aware of a condition that they previously had no knowledge of.

In *The Trainee*, Pilvi Takala takes on the role of a marketing trainee at Deloitte for a month, where she is sitting at her workstation in the office doing nothing all day for a month long. Gradually she becomes a noticeable objection for her “colleagues”; the act of doing nothing so obviously out in the open is very obtrusive to them. Besides showing difference in behavior, her resistance to work and non-engagement in any activity is an indirect threat to them. She will have the potential to do anything by not doing what is desired from her. By not obeying the rules of order, she is a threat to order.

This is why the “basket of deplorables”⁴ want artists to stop what they are presumably doing (*uhm, nothing?*), get a normal job or at least serve them with something they want to see or hear. The idea that someone is acting on different terms — are these her own terms or is she a mole? — and doing something other than what they do is unbearable to them. We agreed to be workers and to work on the same terms, so can we please all do that?

4 “Basket of deplorables” is my favorite Hillary Clinton remark during her 2016 presidency campaign, that backfired and helped her lose the presidency claim. Basket of deplorables refers to the dissatisfied white middle-class multitude: ‘The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic — you name it (...) with their offensive, hateful, mean-spirited rhetoric.’, Clinton says.



Pilvi Takala in *The Trainee*, where she infiltrates as marketing trainee at Deloitte for the month of February, 2008, day 4 and day 22.



CHAPTER TWO

TWO.1

Current state of the contemporary artist [November 10, 2016]

I feel the need to make a small sidestep due to current events and walk a bit further on the path of the last paragraph of the first chapter. As Stefan Ruitenbeek explains in his web series KIRAC about the art subsidy debate, the artist finds himself in a headlock of right wing politicians and angry — mostly on-line — anti-art protesters (Keeping It Real Art Critics 00:03:32). When people, in this case artists, are constantly being told that they're useless, their primal reaction is to prove the opposing party that they do have use. So the artist starts to involve himself with social projects in the neighborhood, doing public services and stand up for the rights of refugees, etc, etc. By doing so, the artist is doing good, giving back to society and proves himself (and indirectly the accusing party too) that he is a useful member of society.

The setback of this constant proving is that the artist gradually becomes obsessed with this dialectic. This creates a perverse entanglement (Ruitenbeek even calls it a *Stockholm Syndrome*) between the artist and the right wing block — the “basket of deplorables” and “their” politicians who constantly humiliate the artist and ensure them they are useless and they have to work for their money. In reaction, artists begin to adopt a “left” identity, by acting as a *Gutmensch* who are of

good service and by doing the right thing. This is how artists politicize themselves more and more, embracing this identity and thereby attempting to capture the moral high ground.⁵

TWO.2 Two methods: The Advocate and The Imp

⁵ KIRAC is the abbreviation of Keeping It Real Art Critics, a series in which artist Stefan Ruitenbeek and art critic Kate Sinha analyze and review the contemporary (Dutch) art world from their insiders view. Because of their direct approach and merciless tone, KIRAC gets criticized too and accused of being opportunists: attacking the art system while being Mondriaan funded to make this series.

Let's apply this current state of the artist to the methods of intervention and infiltration. Here I would like to make a distinction between infiltration and intervention in art. Where the intervention artist is concerned with social, political and economical situations and unmasking the truth in order to try to effect change, the infiltration artist is not interested in the process of unveiling and rather partakes in the situation in order to gain as much information as possible. Although a possible outcome of an act of infiltration can be unmasking; it's not the goal of the act itself.

In *Pranking Rhetoric*, Christine Harold explains that at least two modes of intervention or resistance emerge out of and in response to the logics of disciplinarity and control —sabotage and appropriation. Here she loosely partners sabotage as opposing tactic to disciplinarity and appropriation to control:

Media pranksters, an increasingly active type of consumer activist, prefer affirmation and appropriation to opposition and sabotage. Whereas the culture jammer as saboteur opposes commercialism through revelatory rhetoric such as parody, pranksters can be seen as comedians, as playful explorers of the commercial media landscape. (...) Unlike the ascetic, the comedian is not interested in revenge or "bringing the people to

consciousness" as if she can use her comedy to expose the truth or push the limits of power until they reveal their true logic. These are the goals of the parodist, not the comedian. (Harold 194)

Because intervention art over the years became so heavily institutionalized (for instance with exhibitions and festivals of interventions organized by museums and galleries, i.e. the traditional art world), the revealed "truths" and the process of making people aware also become fairly conventional and generally accepted activist opinions within the discourse they're proclaimed in.

To reveal, one must stand in a familiar place and know just what is behind the spectacular curtain. In contrast, the comedian is something of a surfer with no firm, knowable ground on which to stand. Rather, she learns to navigate a force that is already in motion and will continue to be in motion long after she has passed. Whereas parodists attempt to change things in the name of a presupposed value, comedians diagnose a specific situation, and try something to see what responses they can provoke. (Harold 194)

I am drafting two models here to make the distinction clear and to summarize the last two sub-chapters of this chapter.

1. The Advocate

This would be the intervention artist, the culture jammer with parody and sabotage as his tools in order to unveil “hidden” truths and bring people to consciousness. He values humanistic and altruistic goals in life higher than utilitarian ones. This person is an idealist, an activist inspired to expose what’s wrong and right.

2. The Imp

The Imp refers to the infiltration artist, the comedian, a provoker and a playful explorer who gathers information and diagnoses situations. This figure is a strategist, an opportunist who considers all information as data. He marks interpersonal goals as same as utilitarian ones and reads the situation to see what suits him best. If we describe *The Advocate* as an activist, *The Imp* can be seen as a lobbyist.

The Imp has a lot of similarities in methods with a cultural anthropologist, studying his focus group by joining (infiltrating) and collecting information about them. The more open they are to new ideas, concepts, and things which are unfamiliar in their own culture, the better will be the absorption of those entities. The main difference is however that *The Imp* is not bound by professional ethics whatsoever so he can act as a free agent on his own conditions. *The Imp* and the anthropologist do share the fascination for encounters — why people in general like to travel, go to openings or attend

events: the possibility of something unexpected to happen.

In *The Trainee* (see *chapter one.2*) Pilvi Takala uses the method of *The Imp*. She infiltrates the organization by getting employed as a marketing trainee and she starts like any other, using the tools and routines provided by her new employer. At the same time, she diagnoses the situation around her: what does the company expect and what are her co-workers doing, how do they act and how do they spend time during supposed work hours? Gradually her daily routines shift into doing less until she is openly doing nothing. Her objective is not ridiculing the company and its employees by revealing the banalities of their daily routines. Takala researches human behavior by dropping a new, maladjusted form of work ethic and her interest is how this affects her colleagues and how they act being exposed to this. With doing nothing — inside the moral principle of labor — Takala puts typical animal behavior on display. That’s what frightens people the most, the fear of being aimless which lowers them to the level of animalism.

CHAPTER THREE

THREE.1

The Trojan Host

Until now we only spoke about the Trojan Horse in reference to the act of infiltration, the situation where the Horse finds himself as a guest. But the Trojan Horse can also decide to reverse his act and receive guests while he is their host. In this case, the Trojan Horse sets up the framework which is a situation where he invites guests who then without knowing it become part of his research center. Let's start again by using an example of my own practice as a case study.

During *Kunstvlaai* 2012⁶, the Group XIII presented an interactive research center for contemporary culture called *24hr LAN Party People*.⁷ The website of the collective (24lan.org) showed a catalogue of continuous and on the spot production of art works and was live updated during the 10 days of the festival, viewing research progress based on *Kunstvlaai* visitors' input & sells.

The space provided by the *Kunstvlaai* organization counted 3 rooms: the main space which was a long and quite narrow room; a small room with windows attached to that and a back room for storage behind it. During the 10 days of the festival we would constantly produce art works in the middle part of the space and sell it in the

6 *Kunstvlaai* 2012 / InExactly This! *Kunstvlaai* was initiated in 1997 by the Sandberg Institute as a response to *KunstRAI*, a commercial fair for contemporary art in Amsterdam, to showcase experimental works of project spaces, art(ist-run) initiatives and platforms.

7 Group XIII was an artist collective (2012-2013) that counted 6 members — including me — their 6 alter ego's and an enlightened despot who visualized all the collective bodies and minds of the group. See www.albanbras.nl/24lan for the archived version of the catalogue of works. All images with red dots on them were sold during the project.

front part. We would also sleep in this main room where the back part of the space functioned as a storage for their beds. Through sales — every work had the price of €30 — and visitor's input we tried to evaluate the works and produce new works according to that. At the end of the 10 day long marathon project we sold 124 works.

There are some important parameters to highlight that played a role in the decision making process and were the spine of the project during the 10 days. First of all, *Kunstvlaai* provides a stage for “experimental” art. The conversion of a “commercial gallery space” presented in the overarching experimental framework was interesting. This is not what people expect to rise on an occasion like this, but at the same time it was striking how easy the public accepted the *highly commercial* appearance of the project and brought a work home with them. The price was fairly approachable too, which made it easily accessible for people to gather the works as a memento of an experimental art biennial they attended.

The question we asked ourselves is what experimental really means. It seemed to us it gradually became a synonym for *crazy*, just by having a volatile look at the former editions of the festival. So to us, by concluding that crazy became the status quo norm of the experimental art context, the most radical thing to propose was a highly generic gallery space filled with 2D

works in generic sizes (A3 and A4). The former school building was partially trashed, had a lack of maintenance and therefore breathed a *squat vibe*, so we patched it up, painted it and put a red floor carpet in. This gave our space the desired professional glance inside the overall appearance of the rest of the building.

Furthermore, we were testing out an economy that questioned the “jackpot mentality” we inherited from our Fine Arts bachelor programs. By emphasizing the production value towards quantity instead of quality, fast production ways, democratic prices and the direct influence of people in the production of works we did not just question the economic art system — how it could be rendered on a first layer — but mainly explored the full extent of experimental art. By reviewing the definition of “experimental”, we see the following:

- Made or done in order to see how well something works
- Using a new way of doing or thinking about something (Merriam-Webster)

The production of works and their economic model we used were literally these points above. We were testing out, surveying without using a survey form — well, our work and its strategies were the survey forms — and using the outcomes as tactics for our new works. The result was a constant production, feedback and reproduction. A lot of works were



24hr LAN Party People, top view of gallery (before opening time), day 2. In the back with window the production of work takes place.

literally cut up or sawed in pieces after reviews, we sold parts of that and glued the sawing remains back together in order to recreate new pieces, which we sold again. And for the first time in our young artistic existence, we actually sold our work and made money.

The dilemma of this former project is that it was still situated within an institutional art context, despite the initial experimental and opposing character of the festival. The public attending this kind of events already come prepared for encounters of different kinds, and projects taking place in an art-related context researching within this same context — while the relevance of the research actually has the potential to outgrow this setting — are relatively safe and even more hermetic for the layman.

All the more so, the institutional critique we tried to posit by proposing this project, was already swallowed by the institution itself before we had full understanding of it. As Andrea Fraser describes it in *From the critique of institutions to an institution of critique*:

The institution of art is not something external to any work of art but the irreducible condition of its existence as art. No matter how public in placement, immaterial, transitory, relational, everyday, or even invisible, what is announced and perceived as art is always already

institutionalized, simply because it exists within the perception of participants in the field of art as art, a perception not necessarily aesthetic but fundamentally social in its determination. (Fraser 281)

THREE.2

The Host and his continuous labor

It's always a bit odd to call oneself an artist, as if it represents not only a job or an occupation but also (and even more) a social position or an essence. This position can be considered as being a claim, and in order to uphold that claim you should constantly be ready to “proof” or “deliver”. A question concerning this would be:

Is there any dignity in claiming the position of artist instead of making yourself “useful”?

As part of the Trojan tactics, and also a way of not getting entangled in the problematic dialectic Stefan Ruitenbeek is describing — where the artist gets hijacked and captured in a discourse revolving around conceptions of usefulness and contributions to society — I often use notions of labor and the daily rhythm that comes with it in my practice. Using labor as a performance tactic eliminates the most obvious first layer questions (or rather: interrogation) being “What are you doing?” and “What function does it serve?”. In the environment of my work I am working. I grant myself with a job over a certain period of time — 3 days in *Het Eierrestaurant*, 10 days in *24hr LAN Party People*, 17 days in *Daily Solo Show*. The environment is the playground inside the action of the host as well as the infiltrator. But the environment differs between the two, where the infiltrator obviously joins an existing environment, the host creates one.

There is an important distinction between the three terms I'm using — labor, work and action — that is described by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*. Labor is the human activity in order to sustain itself in its basic needs, such as farming, food preparation, etc. Work goes beyond these needs by shaping and maintaining a world fit for human use and having a clear beginning and end. Action on the other hand, is that what defines us as individuals. As Arendt says: 'the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, [and] corresponds to the human condition of plurality' (Arendt 7).

In my projects and their environments, I take on the function of sales man, waiter, show host or curator and therefore take the responsibility over the project. I can be held accountable because I promised to be back tomorrow, same place, same time. Rendering the reality of everyday life in the most formal sense of the projects, and therefore also in personal activity. As if it is a normal job with a regular daily rhythm, I made a self proposed promise and made it public, and now I am responsible to keep that promise to the public. They know where to find me.

As an artist-host, you set up your “shop”. And by setting up a counter you create the possibility for an encounter. But more importantly, you can be held accountable. I'm getting back to this point, the accountability, because it shows the interesting potential of time management. We know that we, as artists, designers, freelancers of any kind, are

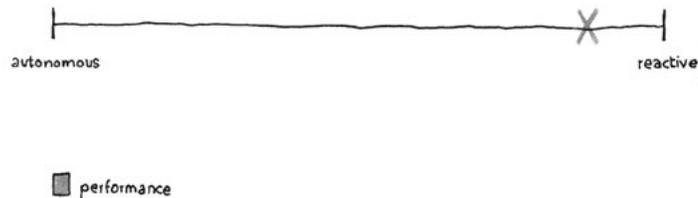
responsible for our own time management and that is what we chose in live. But the problematics are undeniable too: who holds us to our own time management if not ourselves? We know we said to ourselves last night to wake up early and start the day in our studio at 9. But in reality, we compromise our own time management more often than we should, because of whatever reason we come up with — the convenience of unwellness?

By making it public, telling people when to expect you, you create responsibility and accountability over the time you came up with yourself just because people count on you. So by putting your time management in the hands of your public, you actually win back the autonomy to meet your own expectations and theirs too.

Ultimately, I am seeing the operation of the host as an act of performance. As no other form of art, performance can only occur with the presence of public — at least one person. It needs to relate to a public of some sort in order to exist at all. What does that say about the medium's autonomy? On the taxonomy scale from autonomous to reactive (see *figure two.3.1*), a way of categorizing works of art, performance art rubs very close to the latter.⁸

8 I am fully aware that this scale is completely inaccurate, incomplete and random — as I could place the orange cross anywhere. To me though, in the light of current events, how information is being spread through personal bubbles and where opinions become more important parameters for the experience of truth than facts, this scale becomes highly accurate. Not because it's a fact, but because it represents a contemporary truth, or as Stephen Colbert coined it “Truthiness”. Truthiness is something truth-like, used as mockery on the reigning anti-intellectualism attitude of society.

Figure two.3.1



But I'm not merely talking about performance as the acknowledged art form, I am mirroring performance art with society's constant pressure to perform, be ready at any time, having your act together whenever desired. Jan Verwoert calls it the "Politics of Exhaustion".

In a contemporary high performance culture, to draw a line somewhere, stop work and cut off communication at some point—to reserve a part of your life for taking care of yourself—has indeed become a radical thing to do because it effectively means you are taking yourself out of circulation. You deliberately hold back resources, free time and potentials that could be used productively. (Verwoert 107)

After expressing these recognizable problematics of the permanent pressure to perform, he describes a positive side effect of this stress. Constantly having to perform is not only or just fulfilling in the traditional conception of labor — where work gives significance to life — but the burden of being used has an erotic appeal that brings discharge.

The refusal to claim your potentials as private property and the will to allow them to be exhausted by others implies a generosity that has little to do with moral altruism. It seems rather more driven by an unrestrained desire to enjoy and be enjoyed by others. Bill Withers probably best expressed this in his R&B classic

“Use Me” (1972) “I wanna spread the news that if it feels this good getting used / Oh you just keep on using me until you use me up.”

The erotic force of this desire to be exhausted in turn points to the sexual dimension of a high performance culture. Sex work is one of the fastest growing industries today. And, without wanting to turn “sex work” into a loose metaphor, I still feel that the unconditional readiness to perform whenever and wherever that is expected from freelancers as well as from artists and intellectuals operating in a project-based arts economy somewhat resembles the pressure put on the sex worker to always get it on. Yet, even though this pressure can never be disconnected from the potential to perform, it should also not be confounded with it. For there is undeniably a genuine joy in recognising one’s own potentials in the act of realising them.

(...) This inextricable ambivalence between what you want and expect of yourself and what others want and expect from you is probably one of the hardest puzzles for anyone who works both creatively and on demand to solve. One consequence is that an uncanny feeling of outside determination and dependency might never leave you, even if you are positively sure that you only do what you want to do. Here again, to push yourself beyond the point of exhaustion is a common technique to relieve yourself of the burden of outside expectations;

you simply incapacitate yourself to a degree that no-one can possibly still expect anything of you. (Verwoert 108)

What has just been discussed here? *Figure two.3.1* brought the autonomous or reactive nature of a medium to attention. That performing in the broadest sense is always reactive, because there’s always a pressure to deal with, a pressure to live up to your own time management, a pressure to deliver on demand and a pressure to live up to the expectations of others. The concept of performance cannot be detached from the anticipation that comes with it. Inherent to the essence of the term, performing is an externalization of your act and therefore cannot be seen apart from a recipient and his expectations.

What Jan Verwoert is adding to the continuous expectations within high performance culture and what I’m trying to underline with my work, is the attraction of living up to it. Instead of pointing out the problematics — that Verwoert and I both do in recognizing how these questionable politics functions — we see a sort of redemption in being used. This is why we need to perform and why it should be us on that stage, behind that desk, us in the center of the crowd. We need to perform and therefore we need to be used because we need to be needed.

To elaborate on *chapter two.1*, where I concluded that artists politicize themselves more and more, my critique is that these artists willingly step into the cavity sculpted for them to be in. When “trolls” question your usefulness, protest and argue you and your pursuits in their political outcries, it’s the most evident route to go their opposite way and prove yourself to be a useful, tolerant and understanding person. Living up to the pretend-needs of society, artists take on exactly the role that is created for them. But here’s the relief: you don’t have to.

THREE.3 **Infinite roles** **of the artist**

One of the few but nevertheless very powerful options in being an artist is the freedom to take on every role that's desired or needed, which is the artist's "trump card".⁹ This is what infiltrators, "culture jammers" and hosts do, they take on a role. Shadowing the work of other people. A role is a relational concept, connected to a role of someone else and part of a bigger system. Roles are not solid, they are just decided at a certain moment and people tend to stick to them because they are the most convenient option.

But with taking on a new role — and I mean that in the most serious, non-theatrical and adaptive sense of the word — we can create function, participation and the option of modification for ourselves within the system we operate in.

There are many well known examples of artists taking on roles like a shaman (Joseph Beuys), host of a dinner ceremony (Rirkrit Taravaijia), a stalker (Sophie Calle) or, as Marina Abramović (1946) did in the beginning period of De Appel Arts Center in Amsterdam, a role exchange, where she befriended a prostitute in the Red Light district of Amsterdam and proposed to change roles. The prostitute went to attend the exhibition opening, and Abramović took a seat behind the window. Taking on a role as the artist is doing in these examples mentioned above is something exceedingly different than a role within a theater play. With taking up this role, they take a position which questions the

representative meaning of roles within societal system.

During the Brussels Art Fair 2003, the Antwerp based gallery Maes & Matthys showed the work *The Pink Sting* of Vaast Colson (1977), a Belgian artist-factotum. This object, a backpack, was the only work on display in their gallery stand during the length of the fair. But actually, on the outside of the stand, Colson was standing against the gallery wall wearing this backpack for six days long.

Hans Theys (1963), a Belgian art critic and curator, wrote about this work in his 2009 essay *Colourful and Buzzing Castoffs: The Work of Vaast Colson and Dennis Tyfus*: 'This performance is still characteristic of Colson's work, which could be described as a reflection about the position of the artist, a continuous search for resistance, an exercise in perseverance and an attempt to summarize a situation in a visual image' (Theys).

By doing this performance during the full period of the fair, Colson was appropriating the one most important role in our societal system: that of the working human being, using labor as a form of (artistic) right to existence.

9 As I just found out, the card that could be used at a decisive and opportune moment and gives the owner a certain advantage to trick the other players is called a "trump card".

CHAPTER FOUR

FOUR.1 The face of the Trojan Horse

Until now I only spoke about the intentions of the Trojan Horse: the strategies, methods and tactics it uses and why it chooses to do so; its agenda. Looking at the outer shell of the original Trojan Horse — *the physical monument of promise* — we see (or imagine: the thing we tend to see is shaped in our collective memory by paintings, myths and movies) this enormous megalomaniac object on wheels towering over the crowd, representing a horse in all its aspects: strength, freedom, power, mobility, grace, beauty.

As I mentioned before, the wooden horse — as the Greeks refer to it — was there to be noticed. Let it be clear that the Trojan Horse was not an undercover act of espionage, this mountainous sculpture had been presented as a gift that shined a divine posture. This is why I cannot agree to call malicious software “Trojan Horses”: they are inelegant entities such as fill-in-forms and executables, often spread through emails, with the intent to have unauthorized access to an affected computer. Yes, it’s an act of infiltration, and we might say that the aesthetics of this malware lies in the code, but it fails to wear the overwhelming *sculptural* elegance of the ancient wooden horse’s appearance and therefore doesn’t deserve to bear this name. The wooden horse was a thing of beauty that was carried in like a gift through the front door.

After graduating from my fine arts bachelor, I locked myself up in a studio for two years. I knew I

had to build this *horse*, but my technical qualities and aesthetics were not developed enough to come out and enter somewhere through the front entrance. I think I always saw the art world and its exhibition spaces as an impenetrable fortress if I couldn't provide the correct penetration vehicles for it.

The reason why I'm telling this is because infiltrating — adapting and shadowing the work and appearance of others (generalization) — primarily has to do with the outer shell of things. This outer shell, the presented layer, needs to be convincing in its construction (much like the composition of a joke should be taken utterly seriously) and / or appearance. The presentational skin can be armored by what Jeff Chapman (1973–2005) — better known by his pseudonym Ninjalicious — coined as the “credibility prop” in his book *Access All Areas* (Ninjalicious 37). This credibility prop describes a device, piece of equipment, a uniform or other garnitures used to lower suspicion when encountering an area that is usually restricted. One of the credibility prop methods proposed by Chapman was simply “being wet”. Wetness, preferably in combination with wearing hotel towels, is a well equipped way to infiltrate hotel pools.

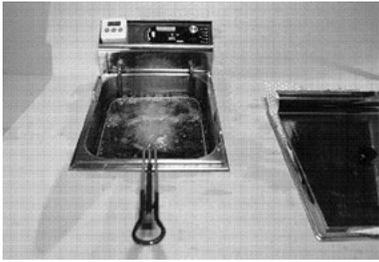
In that sense I was most satisfied with the appearance of *Het Eierrestaurant* that me and my

at that time artist collective created in 2014.¹⁰ The sculptural quality as well as the functionality of it was convincing enough to be rendered as a “real restaurant”. Of course the place was a bit odd, it was over-thematic in its color scheme of yellow and lilac: from the pictures on the wall to the poultry run at the entrance, from the corporate uniforms to the restaurant's furniture, the kitchen, the curtains and the fences around the table. All constructed or collected as credibility props. But still, it came together, outgrow the materiality and functioned as an actual restaurant where people had meals for three days long. We didn't just take on a role, we took on the whole place. We built this space as a stage to perform.

And then we closed.

Why did we close after three days? Because we decided to do that at the mere start of the project. The arguments that it was “too good to close” or “all that work for nothing” were highly unimportant. We determined the time frame so we had to stick to this. The time frame — the idea that there is a start and an end point — is one of the more important parameters of what transforms the created environment into a work of art. If we would compromise this, it would become daily life.

¹⁰ De Gym is an artist collective temporarily residing in an anti-squat former disco in the city center of Groningen. The building is continuously upholstered by its members with a new appearance and (fake) marketing concepts that belong to it. Existing from 2013–now, one of De Gym's founding fathers — me — left in 2015. De Gym. See albanbras.nl/eierrestaurant.php for an insight on this project.



Het Eierrestaurant (The Egg Restaurant) just after opening time, April 18, 2014, full setup.

In 2013, Vaast Colson made the third version of his project called *To Retitle an Object Daily During the Course of a Show*, in the MuHKA Museum of Antwerp.¹¹ As highlighted before in *chapter three.3*, Colson almost always uses notions of labor, daily repetition and a set time frame in the infrastructure of his projects. In this particular project, a presented object — a Micky Mouse figure strapped on a column with a blue strap — is provided with a different title by Colson every day, in order to make the work more meaningful, to “charge” and “recharge” it. During the course of a show in this case was 30 days, which meant 30 titles that he had to make and stick on the wall every day. This time frame (that was already announced in the title) set the start and end of his performance. Obviously, he wouldn’t continue after this 30 period. After all, it wasn’t daily life what he was showing us. The act was rendering a daily rhythm and by that questioning and exploring the position of the artist in an everyday situation. For Colson, it was a rather logical, consistent attitude to ponder on this object every day and accordingly receive an average MuHKA employee loan.

With *Het Eierrestaurant* I consider myself to be indebted to Guillaume Bijl’s “Transformation

¹¹ *To Retitle an Object Daily During the Course of a Show*, done three times between 2006-2013, where the first time was a banal object (2006, a bucket), the second time an object of desire (2009, a bass guitar) and the third an object chosen by a client (2013, Micky Mouse out of the Vrielynck collection of the MuHKA Museum of Antwerp).



Vaast Colson sticking on a new title to the work, MuHKA Antwerp, 2013.

Installations”.¹² But where Bijl, a Belgian installation artist, displaced reality by making imitations of commercial everyday interiors and by placing them out of their contexts like in *Autorijschool Z*, we desired not to mimic an archetypical visual identity and shift its context by displacement, but to create and build an over-saturated version of everyday marketing concepts in the periphery of our restaurant. The outcome though is similar to those of Bijl: transforming a setting into a banal, objective and utilitarian reality.

12 From the end of the 1970's until current day Guillaume Bijl creates what he calls “Transformation Installations” [a reality within the non-reality] and from more recent on “Situation Installations” [a non-reality within the reality]. Well known works in these methods are respectively *Autorijschool Z* (Driving School Z, in Gallery Z Antwerp, 1979) and *Matratzenland* (Mattress Land, in Kunsthalle Münster, 2002).

FOUR.2 Collecting of the host

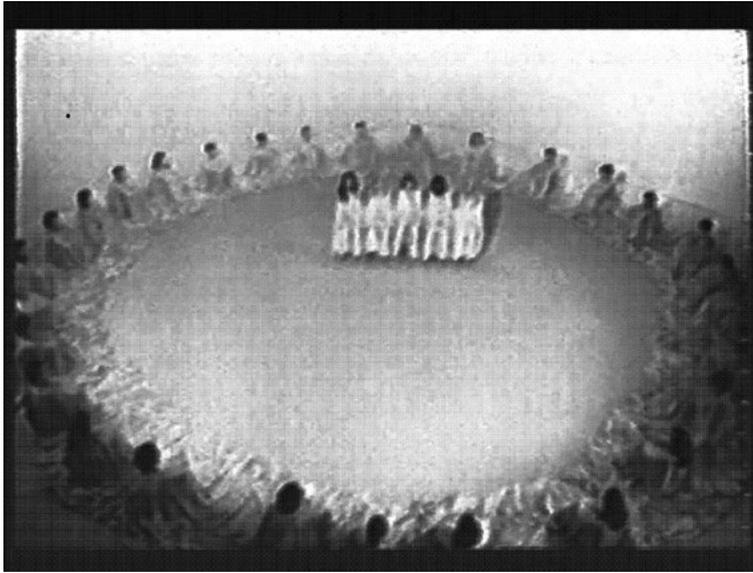
Slowly I could conclude that the main objective of Trojan Horseness is collecting information in order to produce work. James Bridle even adjudges that Wikileaks and NSA, sworn political opponents, take the same *political* approach of assembling data to generate knowledge (Bridle).

But as I concluded already in *chapter two.2*, it's not *The Imp's* position to be interested in potential threats or injustice and to unveil them and bring them to light. Rather he would put another layer of confusion or complexity to the existing problematic instead of disentangling it.

In 1968, James Lee Byars conceived a work called *The World Question Center*, that was an attempt to collect questions from some of the '100 most brilliant minds' of that time.¹³ Broadcast live on the Belgian television station BRT, Byars asked his attendants — a wide range of artists, intellectuals, scientists and showbiz personalities he contacted over the phone or were present in the room — the same question: 'Could you present us a question that you feel is pertinent with regard to the evolution of your own knowledge?'

The unusual pseudo-scientific approach that Byars is partaking here in the process of collecting data if that he's compiling questions instead of answers to his question. At a certain moment Byars, on the phone with a confused Cristoph Alexander, says:

¹³ James Lee Byars (1932-1997) was an American sculptor and performance artist. The full transcript of Byars' *The World Question Center* is available at <http://www.dewitteraaf.be/artikel/detail/nl/4282/>



James Lee Byars, *The World Question Center*, live broadcast at BRT on November 28, 1968.

‘Well, we’re calling people throughout the world tonight, trying to collect questions that they are concerned with themselves and I wonder if you might give us a question that is particularly important to you, that’s all.’

The appearance of Byars in his performance — accompanied by four women on his both sides who kept quiet the whole evening, taking place inside the top center of a circle of partakers, dressed in a pink robe and wearing a high hat — was somewhere between a shaman, a cult figure and a show host. Byars’ main role is being the moderator of the show, but he’s not making things clear or converging the questions into a concluding direction. He’s only collecting questions.

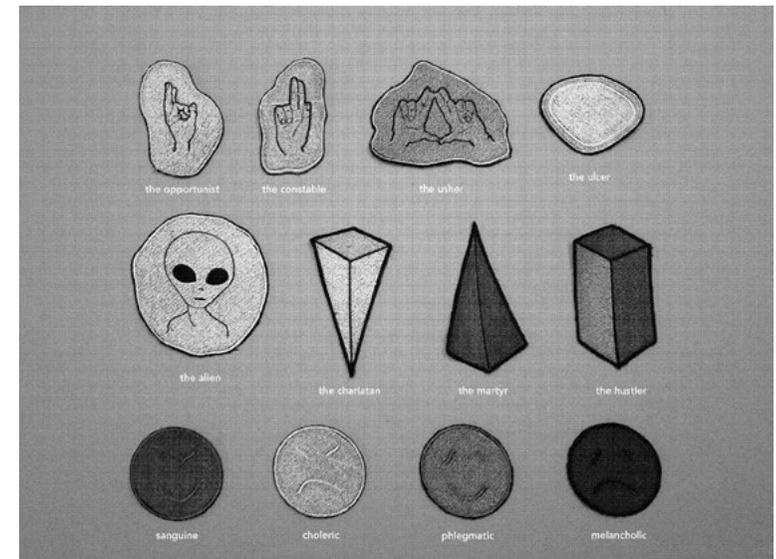
What is the correspondence between conspiracy groups, shamans, cult figures and show hosts? It’s something you can lose yourself in as a follower, as a participant, as public. And *the Imp* has the rare possibility, freedom and talent to embody these characters.

In the *Daily Solo Show*, a recent project I did in Milan together with Kitty Maria, we curated, generated and presented a 17 days long ongoing exhibition marathon, where all participants of *The Wandering School*¹⁴ have a solo show lasting one day, and including an opening and an opening talk,

14 The Wandering School was a continuous living and exhibiting platform during the MiArt (Milan Art Week) and Salone del Mobile (Design Week Milan) in a Milan based politically and culturally engaged squatting collective called M^AC^AO, done by members of the Dirty Art Department of the Sandberg Institute, Amsterdam.

carefully mediated by us, the two hosts. Next to notions of labor and the politics of exhaustion I mentioned in earlier, the role that we, as curators of this ongoing event, rewarded ourselves with was ambiguous. On one hand, we made a programme and a framework, invited people to join and write us a proposal and eventually help them set up their show the best way we could. We built a shape-shifting gallery space that was completely designed on the act of opening: with hinges on every corner the space could take any desired shape and the white walls were made of rolling curtains that could open or close partially or completely at any moment. Every opening was designed to serve the participant in the best way possible. On the other hand, we were collecting information of any sort in order to produce work. Already early in the year, we started writing down observations of the participants — that happened to be our classmates — which we objectified through a system of archetypes we assembled.

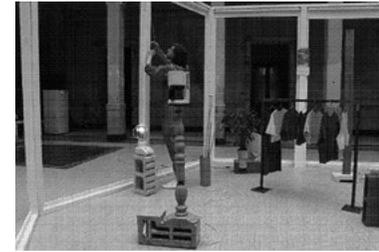
First, for the participant's expression, we used the *Humorism* of Hippocrates (c. 460 - c. 370 BC), a system of taxonomizing the four temperaments connected to the four bodily fluids of the human body — phlegm, yellow bile, black bile and blood. “The Four Temperaments” described in the *Humorism* is a proto psychological theory that suggests that there are four fundamental personality types: phlegmatic — relaxed and peaceful; choleric — short tempered or irritable;



melancholic — analytical and quiet; and sanguine — optimistic and social (Various, Hippocrates 26).

After that, we used Joey Roth's concept on the balance of work / talk: *Charlatan, Martyr, Hustler* as a classification of the exhibitor's work-ethics, and following that I made drawings of five characteristics of personality to make a completion of 12 archetypes, being *The Constable, The Usher, The Opportunist, The Alien* and *The Ulcer*. Of all this figures we made embroidered badges we pinned on our suits in different combinations according to the analysis we made of that day's contributor.

With these uniforms, that we wore for the full period of 17 days and only differed in the badges pinned on it per day, we were the hosts opening the show. This, the returning and solid factor every day at the same time and at the same place, in combination with the amplified opening talks we did, made us into *show* hosts. It was our show, "parasitizing" on the input of the participants by giving them a stage on to which we climbed ourselves too.



Daily Solo Show, day 5 of a 17 day long performance. Elise Ehry's opening *Bed Piece*, where the hosts performed their opening on a bed for the occasion, while wearing the badges "The Opportunist" and "The Hustler".

CONCLUSION

The Applause Machine, a conclusion

What moves modern-day culture? This is an issue that drives me, as a short-lived ex-student of anthropology, in all the projects and researches I have created and participated in up to now. The loose appropriation of field research in my works is for sure a heritage of that compressed period, although the research of this very subject — field research through means of infiltration and hosting — is solely conducted by armchair scholarship.

While rigging this research piece I described, analyzed and compared the strategies and tactics of Trojan Horseness used in various practices that result into a work of art. Trojan Horseness is a two-headed practice organized around infiltrating and hosting infrastructures of *problematic* get-togethers. To disentangle the act of infiltration from intervention art or “culture jamming” — acts that are all taken place outside the traditional art institutes — I drafted two models: *The Advocate* and *The Imp*. Where *The Advocate*’s main objective is to bring people to consciousness by revealing what’s behind the spectacular curtain, exposing what’s wrong and right, *The Imp* is a more slippery type; a provoker and a playful explorer who gathers information, appropriates behavioral codes and diagnoses situations. If *The Advocate* can be considered an activist, *The Imp* can be rendered a lobbyist.

Concerning the title of this research the analogy between the host-as-mediator and an applause

machine is quite apparent: as activator of a situation by being the guide and conductor between the piece, the situation, the show and its audience. Seemingly, the applause machine refers to a mechanism where beforehand recorded audience behavior is set in motion in order to trigger the “real” audience, visitors or viewers and prompt them into the release of their laughter, outrage, approval, cheering and so on. As an infiltrator of mood management, the host can be held accountable for the overall atmosphere of the event he’s hosting and therefore can be rendered as a weather modification device made flesh — as a human cloudbuster deciding if it stays sunny or when it will start raining.

Weather modification is also what happens in the act of infiltration, where the infiltrator (like Takala) introduces a certain unexpected or unconventional behavior in a group dynamic and by that affects the mood and thereby actions of this group of people.

The tools of *The Imp* — affirmation and appropriation — are used to usurp certain “rules of the game” in acts of infiltration as well as hosting. Gaining a deep knowledge of site-specific language, social mores and habits are necessary for a successful integration process. These are mostly *ready-made procedures* and must be adapted to convince. A “credibility prop” as proposed by Jeff Chapman can be helpful to

be regarded as credible; like a uniform, a piece of equipment, a device.

I have always found the context of the workplace more interesting than that of the exhibition space, because it is the same context of the brother, the uncle, the neighbor, and the same context of the paramount voice that states: just make yourself useful and go work. That’s why I often use notions of labor in my works and, foremost, employ myself with a job. In other words, creating the situation where your performance is needed. Work, the politics of exhaustion and the continuous pressure to perform have become the aorta of all my projects so far and throughout writing also for this research. Alien Exoticism? Perhaps. For one whose usual state is unemployment, finding a daily rhythm and function through work is rather an incitement.

With joining modes of work, in contrast to opposing or refusing, it’s possible to create function, participation and the option of modification for ourselves within the system we operate in. At least temporarily, it is important to note that the conducted field research; the period of infiltration or continuous hosting has a start and an end moment: its time frame. Otherwise it would become daily life.

The Trojan Horse acts as an agent of exchange, proposing a transactional model of *mutual*

parasitism. Instead of sharing dinner at the same table, you are selling and feeding (i.e. parasitizing) on the input of each other during an encounter.

With the host as well as the infiltrator, my interest lies in the mechanism of how rituals are played out and how these influence a certain behavior. With transposing rules from one field to another, I am creating a new skin for the old ritual.

Ultimately, Trojan Horses can be seen as a back door strategy towards function and position in society. Beware, these strategies do not function as an indictment to the art institutions. I do not wish to infect my actions with a melancholic critique. Rather I see them as ways to keep performing, even in times when one is not officially invited to perform, and, in addition to that, establishing one's right to existence in a work driven society.

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