

ON PRODUCTION & WHAT NOW – YOU SAY IT

The sketches of an eternally doubting DIY object fetishist

1. HETERNITY

As far as I am concerned, anyone making anything unique, which did not exist before, can call themselves an artist. Somewhere, in the back of their mind – and particularly those who agree with me as regards this statement – is a man (or a woman) who says, 'It's for eternity! Vincent van Gogh! It's for eternity! Arthur Rimbaud! It's for eternity! Bach!', and so on and so forth. Even in a person with a heightened sense of perspective there is the probability that he, or she, will cherish the comforting thought that the work will more likely than not survive its maker.

And it doesn't matter anyway. If you are dead you are unaware of anything. If you are alive you wish to eat. And a drink to boot is not to be sneezed at either. So, everyone hoping to be the next Van Gogh is as mad as a hatter. Who in their right mind wants to die in abject poverty with an ear torn to shreds? While any number of jerks – the sort that would not have deigned to wipe their fat buttocks on your paint rag when you were still alive – got filthy rich on the proceeds from your painting.

So here's to a life and to work with a limited shelf life. Nobody ever died of starvation through lack of pretentiousness.

2. ACNE SELF

How it all started: I, a non-communicative teenager with few friends but enough acne to drive a hybrid SUV (do they exist?) to Moscow, discovered punk in 1977 and its inherent DIY principle. Which means, Do It Yourself Jerk! I therefore, under the influence of the KK Dubio collective, started my own magazine called: Als Moeder Sterft (literally translated as: If Mother Dies). It never (then) occurred to me that my mother would not exactly be over the moon about the title. Thanks to that magazine I got to know kindred spirits – some of whom I still count among my friends – and developed a custom that has to this day not been broken (1).

That custom is: produce one thing each year, preferably something you can grasp hold of although it may also be less tangible – for instance: a festival, a radio programme etc. I started with 'fanzines' (with names like the following: Lemon Custard, Hard Lies and suchlike [Het Groentje, Hard Liegen, Hannibal Apollo, Citroenvla]). These days you would call them a weblog and they would be virtual. I was fortunate (?) to be living in tangible times. To be able to hold my creations in my hand: stencilled, printed or copied. It was such a great feeling when holding a fresh example for the first time that you could smell it and leaf through it numerous times. Later on they became booklets (I worked for an artist's collective, known as Het Rotterdams Kunstgesticht, that published bibliophile editions on an old printing press), which in turn became sound recordings: from the cassette (a maximum of 50) to vinyl and CDs. Since the age of 19 I have tangible evidence of every year of my life. (After all, you can't take it with you when you're gone, so why not?)

3. INTROSPECTION # 76

The core reason why I produce material is because I need to look at something outside of myself; a materialization, that is, of what is inside me. But the two shall never meet at equal levels, that just won't happen. There's a link missing somewhere. I need to look at my product and be amazed at what has been made. The production process fades into a vague spot in my memory once it is all over. I do not specifically recall how I came up with certain ideas, how they were developed further or the moment in

which I decided it was finished. What remains is a physical footprint that may help in creating the next thing, but which excludes the possibility of literally repeating the steps that were taken. The hard disk is automatically erased. It is related, of course, to my 'format-less' and sculptural way of working. I don't stand for anything in particular; as a creator I don't have a firmly established identity. This means that I might perhaps remain forever a sort of eternal dilettante in certain fields, and if you really want to ventilate hostile (well...) criticism about my work you could say it lacks 'depth' or is not 'multilayered'. My answer to such a remark is that it's easier said than done and you shouldn't be too quick to generalize, but for the rest I will happily stay speechless.

As an afterthought intrinsic to the latter, I must mention that I have never understood the multilayerists, the tried-and-tested turbo-developers. The kind of people who spend their entire life or half of it churning out roughly the same version of more or less the same thing. Klaas Gubbels – who started with coffee pots and ended with tables, or was it the other way round? – was always an archetype of that in my mind's eye. In the audio arts we have highly respected people such as Tony Conrad and Philip Niblock. They are really nice blokes, I met them once. But how can you keep yourself amused for forty years with wishy-washy (or heavy) droning? Never-ending droning on, please, I beg you, stop! Sing a song for fuck's sake! (Or, turned on its head: Marco Borsato, try fine-meshed improvised singing by doing a Phil Minton workshop, or with Han Buhrs etc.) The funny thing is, the intelligentsia (the custodians/curators of the music world) are the ones who put them on a pedestal. Which is only logical, because the smaller the audience for this music, the more room there is for declamations that go on and on and on. In this fashion, the German minimal electronic label called MILLE PLATEUAX actually owed its existence more to all the chatter about it than the music it produced. It was so minimal that it disappeared into a self-induced black hole of chatter (but, to be fair, that is also a form of DIY).

Back to the material.

It is important for the object I produce to be a 'multiple'. It would be no use to me if there was just a single example. If we are talking audio, 500 copies has to be the absolute minimum.

Each and every discipline has its own dynamics; a crap artist who paints won't want 500 reproductions of his unique canvas – or installation for that matter – and a filmmaker can regard one print of a 35 mm film as quite something, whereas you can, of course, make large numbers – or small ones – of additional DVDs. And this can keep you going for a while. Material object fetishism diminished somewhat when CDs took over from vinyl. But attractive packaging can put much to rights. I don't mean the stupid plastic trays; take digipack for starters, but bear in mind guys like De Kift and Plan Kruutntone, who make a great work of art with each release, a labour of love to produce, expensive to distribute and promote, but a veritable treat for the customer and the 'true-born' avid collector.

Now that I have just released a DVD for the very first time, I am surprised that I value the nonsensical packaging; after all is said and done a DVD disc is the same size as a CD. What is my conclusion? That I will happily keep on churning out superfluous and obscure objects for the rest of my life. And it sounds now as though it solely concerns the object, but the content is what I produce myself: the packaging acts 'only' like a beacon.

4. RINGING OUT LAZINESS

The things I produce consist of text, sound and sometimes a bit of visual imagery and collage. In some cases music, in some cases something. Creating something always takes a huge effort. Even

writing these sentences. Nothing evolves organically: everything requires a push, an effort, cramps, helplessness and arbitrariness. The effort is not comparable to that of the hard worker, it is more like the effort of the uncertainty of what is about to be made; the draining of energy for the benefit of a crumb of something. (3)

Because as far as content goes there is nothing and nothing exists and a crumb of 'something' is by definition a miracle (for an atheist).

But let's keep it simple; being difficult is bad for your blood pressure. The best reason for doing something is doubt. (2)

And it is always comforting to discover that others share these doubts. I dare to go one step further and contend that people who have NO doubts about the creative process – and who apparently have everything worked out in advance, or make something that is just a repeat of the last thing – are far more superfluous than the doubters. (And long live the Wishful Thinking concept!)

5. MARKETING AND SALES

OK, so you've flogged to death the necessary thoughts about the production process, you've finally messed around somewhat and something has been generated that wasn't there initially, you've come up with a medium to put it in, you've invested money to replicate it... and then what?

Marketing has never, of course, been my strong point. Not that I don't know how it works. If you put in the leg work the rest will follow. I can muster up enough energy to reasonably promote my products... but selling them... it's in the blood or not. That shopkeeper business. That endless exchange of small change. Buzz off.

Lukas Simonis

- 1. I came across a comparable attitude in a recent interview met Kid Congo Powers;** 'Well, now everything is accessible on the computer. If they want to search for something obscure, kids can not even leave their bedrooms and have the world at their touch. Back then you'd have other (record) collectors mailing away; you'd actually have people who were your pen pals, and if you wanted to hear something from England or whatever you'd have to write letters to them. (...) They were very different times. That was the underground, that was your tribe, searching for books, records, art, whatever...fun and kicks. (laughs) The thirst for knowledge was a really big deal for us...' (modernpeapod.com)
- 2. I once interviewed Andrea Neumann where she said the following, for instance;** 'Of course it's extremely difficult when the music is incredibly free or without any rules whatsoever. To have to wonder what the point is when I'm grating the strings: no one can tell me the point of it all. I find it a bit of a paradox as I'm not sure what the purpose is, yet I keep on doing it... and sometimes it's a great deal of fun...' (fake magazine, 2004)
- 3. Antonin Artaud;** 'This hushed and multiform crystallization of thought which chooses its form at a given moment. There's an immediate and direct crystallization of the self in the midst of all possible forms, all modes of thought.'

You can find bits and bobs on Simonis at:

<http://www.xs4all.nl/~lukas/> ; own website

<http://www.myspace.com/lukassimonis> myspace

www.coolhaven.nl ; the website for COOLHAVEN. Lots of stuff on the MP3 page. Don't click too fast or you may get lost.

<http://www.z6records.nl> The LGS in-house label. Lots of reviews (marketing!), mainly for the latest two CDs.