

Our title is loosely evocative of the fact that 2012 is the United Nations 'International Year of the Cooperative' – declared to encourage an inclusive model for working together to a common advantage. Aimed not only at grassroots organizations, it is hoped the financial world will consider this altruistic model, which even in business terms has the bonus of furthering socioeconomic development while it grows. As a title we considered it as a provocation rather than an illustration – the show does not examine say, collective artistic practice. We were drawn to artists with a sensibility that does not simply amplify the social and political but takes a subtle and nuanced - even formalistic- turn in expressing its own inherent ethics and principles.

One dubious achievement of modernity has been to transform ends into means, in the cause of an unquestioned idea of progress whose end has got lost along the way. Radical historian Ivan Illich (1936-2002), "the greatest social critic of the twentieth century", in his 1973 book *Tools for Conviviality* argued his concept of a multidimensional balance of human life 'the shared insight of people that they would be happier if they could work together and care for each other.' Illich reminds us that our human constitution requires us to question ends – who we are, how we should live a good life both individually and collectively – not merely to pursue means.

In Illich's words, "I chose the term "conviviality" to designate the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons... I consider conviviality to be individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value. I believe that, in any society, as conviviality is reduced below a certain level, no amount of industrial productivity can effectively satisfy the needs it creates among society's members. [...] Present... purposes, which hallow industrial productivity at the expense of convivial effectiveness, are a major factor in the amorphousness and meaninglessness that plague contemporary society. The increasing demand for products has come to define society's process." Illich was ultimately optimistic in his writings, hoping to show "how modern science and technology can be used to endow human activity with unprecedented effectiveness."

Our account too, considers this state of consumer modernity from the early 1970s onwards, finding works from that era to the present that explore social, emotional and political consciousness, works that engage with varying degrees of abstraction and post-media conceptualism as a condensate for complex pop cultural, political and social practice.

Mike Bouchet's *Do It Yourself Dissociative Identity Disorder* (2011) videos, reenactments of patient therapy videos that explore 'group' practice therapy enacted by singular patients suffering multiple personality afflictions, provide an intense background to the notion of collective emotional

health in society. The original videos were left to the artist by an uncle after his death –himself a pioneering psychiatrist in his field of multiple personality disorders, (now termed Disassociative Identity Disorder), he was Patty Hearst's criminal psychiatrist. Under hypnosis, he would hold group therapy with all of a single patient's different identities, and record them for research purposes; the transcribed session tapes are interpretively re-created by Bouchet with actors. Here the group cooperation of a single patient's mind games provides the possibility for therapeutic understanding. To represent the two patients Bouchet chose a female actress from the erotic glamour world, the male actor was a model for Calvin Klein in the 1990s.

"I have modeled for Calvin Klein" boasts the narrator of Nicolas Ceccaldi's Copypasta (2010), a handwritten 'letter' of sorts, on the same kind of lined paper the artist used in primary and high school, decorated with glittery stickers around the margins. The content of the text however is not the artist's invention. It is taken from 4chan, spliced and edited together from different posts and merged it into continuous monologues, unified by Ceccaldi's own handwriting. 4chan is an anonymous message board that is known for being the source of internet memes and lewd material where text is copy pasted around ('copypasta'). The material is a disturbing parody of guys from MTV's Jersey Shore, or their way of speaking Braggadocio. Ceccaldi suspects his 4chan source users to be "sexist, racist, frustrated, and depressed", though they are in essence participating in the ultimate in collaborative practice – the 4chan community can be called into action to perform all sorts of online troublemaking. Cultural memes take off and become their own phenomena. Their desires, here, mount to belief in an enviable discount highlife: "I get into New York City's finest clubs as a VIP (jealous, bitches?) and hook up with numerous bitches. I get discounts at high end restaurants and get 15% off all drinks at nightclubs except for cocktails."

Perhaps appealing to the copypasta generation, a series of clogs as breasts are Amy Yao's unusual revision to a classic left wing emblem, her version of a Guy Debord Society of the Spectacle 'movie poster'. In the original text the philosopher laments in 1967 that, "All that was once directly lived has become mere representation." The spectacle is the inverted image of society in which relations between commodities have supplanted relations between people, in which "passive identification with the spectacle supplants genuine activity". Debord argues that the history of social life can be understood as "the decline of being into having, and having into merely appearing." This condition, according to Debord, is the "historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life." Yao makes work that involves wry humor and quiet social commentary, in which meaning is rarely obvious, but such as these 'movie posters' join cultural icon with feminist complexity and colour.

The late Jo Spence's *The Highest Product of Capitalism* (1979) depicts a lone woman holding up a modest placard stating, "I'll take (almost) any work". She stands in front of a wedding outfitters glazed shop exterior, next door to a travel agent advertising 'Low Cost Flights'. Her incongruence with the 'fairytale' femininity of the bridal gown, her personal petition for work showing up the stark relationship between personal endeavour and desire realisation. Spence is celebrated for her ability to pose simple, direct questions, which she asked of herself and of her medium. The work being produced around the processes of 'representation' offered strategies for social struggle: simply exercising control over one's own image could eventually lead to self-management of the means of production in a broader sense. In a similar era, Victor Burgin, made his political pleas in the pages of *Studio International* in 1976. In the Burgin publication *Between* (1986), on the page before this work is reproduced, this quote is announced: "None of us fend for ourselves, we rely upon each other. The expression of this mutual interdependence is a society. Anyone who lives in a society, enjoying its benefits and subject to its restrictions, is 'politically committed' – committed to specific forms of social organization within which he or she occupies objective positions.

Dave McKenzie's *On Premises* (2009) consists of a hangar with a paper text printed 'Jesus Loves Me' hooked on a garment bagging apparatus, a piece he describes as being, "largely about language and how it is easy to twist language towards other ends, but it is also about how statements serve to trap us. I thought about how hangers from the dry cleaners sometimes say, "We love our customers" and how meaningless that statement really is. Yet at the same time love doesn't require an equal relationship. So it can also be understood as a type of tyranny – one is loved without agreeing to be loved." His video *We Shall Overcome* (2004) is inspired by a headline in the *New York Times* in 2003 reading "Mr. Clinton, Your Harlem Neighbors Need to See You More Often", that suggests there were unusually scarce sightings of the former president given his office is located in the neighbourhood. To rectify this absence the artist sets out in a latex Bill Clinton mask, his street walk captured and set to the Louis Armstrong song of the title. The work was made almost a decade ago. Today its direct approach to the street and to political representation mediates a feeling of loss of any sense of integrity in the relation between the public and constitutional politics, just as America embarks on a new presidential election in the era of the first black president, which it is anticipated will become the most intense and dirty campaign in the countries' history.

In Duncan Campbell's 10 minute 16mm film *Sigmar* (2008) the camera continually moves from left to right to see the corners of a room drawn, layering of wallpapers and uneven plaster textures pass by a fake wood tabletop with coffee cups and their ring stains, and an ashtray situates the atmosphere for some carefully drawn stop frame animation - approximations of abstract details from works by German artist Sigmar Polke – further exacerbated by the benday dot backgrounds they

trace a course through. An imagined recitation by the artist in a staccato mother tongue, “nein (no), nicht (not), ich nay”, his apparent sighs and laughter are heard as the various surfaces and icons appear, often appearing to be in response to the imagery we jointly watch. Though Sigmar represents a narrative simplification of Campbell’s longer film works (most recently *Arbeit*, 39 mins, 2011), it demonstrates his ongoing conviction that there is a place to be found between documentary and fiction. In this film the abstract, incoherent quality mirrors Polke’s own development of the sociopolitical questions of his day, which he addressed persistently with appropriation of popular imagery that denied hierarchical distinctions, often fragmentary and illogical.

Made on a giant inexact industrial printer (it can turn turn greytone into yellow), and printed onto a form of upvc canvas that could be the hoarding that covered a Doge’s Palace in scale and durability, Anders Clausen’s ‘Color Picker’ works draw on computer software icons, desktop imagery, emoticons, found imagery and Photoshop toolbars in their variously ‘collaged’ and pristine arrangements. Back to Illich for a moment, and his conviction that he needs to find a framework for evaluating man’s relation to his tools, “Neither a dictatorial proletariat nor a leisure mass can escape the dominion of constantly expanding industrial tools.” And Debord’s earlier notion that being is replaced by ‘having’, which is then replaced by appearing. Clausen asserts a bold relationship with the myriad personal, leisure, business, creative, practical or emotional fragments and essential tools for navigating through the desktop, on which we build our avatars, and acknowledges that they come through pre-existing material, images and texts. Copied and doctored.

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