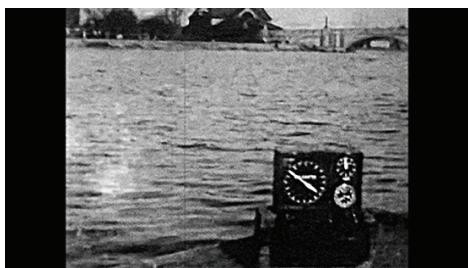


# ***Working Conditions***

**Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, Kajsa Dahlberg,  
Duane Linklater → John Hampton,  
Juan Ortiz-Apuy, Joshua Schwebel**

in conversation with Sam Cotter



KAJSA DAHLBERG, STILL FROM *REACH, GRASP, MOVE, POSITION, APPLY FORCE*, 2015. THIS IMAGE IS CREDITED TO THE FRANK AND LILLIAN GILBRETH PAPERS, 1869–2000, COURTESY OF PURDUE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

*Working Conditions* brings together the work of artists questioning where they stand and what they stand amidst. Acknowledging that the studio exists at the intersection of many ecologies, the artists place themselves in relation to factors beyond their place of production, looking at the power dynamics, blind spots and measures of success contained in the economies and ecosystems surrounding them. Their interactions negotiate complicities, rights and responsibilities while pushing at the blurry boundaries between art and life.

In *Working Conditions*, the act of asking a question is framed as a tool to confront reality: taking stock of both one's position and the conditions around them. Here production is linked to conversation and negotiation, assembling becomes a means of disassembly and concrete answers dissolve into a search for better questions.

Within the exhibition, the term “working conditions” becomes twofold: signalling evaluation, as the artists look outward to understand the mechanics of work and labour framing their practice, and introspection, as the artists form their personal terms of engagement or the conditions under which they are willing to work. Looking at a diverse range of subjects—from the moderators of Wikipedia to the producers of video equipment, from the precarious economies of artist-run centres to the family breakfast table and beyond—the artists in *Working Conditions* ask how their actions influence and are influenced by the world around them.

Curated by Sam Cotter  
June 23 – August 6, 2016

# **Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge**

**Sam Cotter:** I think we should bring a little context to your work, I hope I'm not historicizing it in the show and that I'm treating it as a present set of concerns, but I also have to acknowledge that it was made forty years ago for a specific context.

Karl Beveridge: It was made for an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario [AGO] that opened in January 1976, all the work was made in '75, actually it was made in four months.

**SC:** That's interesting because in *It's still privileged art...*, which is the exhibition catalogue, you make several references to "if we had more time"...

Carole Condé: For the book our process was to put on a tape recorder and talk to each other about our changing ways of thinking, and then we edited that down into what was printed, but the book and the audio recording we made for the show were pulled from the exhibition not long after it opened.

KB: The AGO had a legitimate complaint with the audio, it was driving the staff nuts, but I think it was still withdrawn for the same reasons as the catalogue — it was a clear attempt to take the edge off the exhibition, to remove some of its politics. We were invited to do the exhibition in '74 by Roald Nasgaard, while we were living in New York as sculptors. At that time we were just getting picked up in that art scene, showing and getting in with dealers and collectors, but between then and the exhibition in '76 we

had said "this whole system is crazy." It was that experience that informed the show.

CC: All of our friends at the time were in the same place as we were, they had just made it in their own city and then they left to go to New York. Karl had been bought by the National Gallery, the Vancouver Art Gallery and the AGO, and we'd already had our shows in Canada so it was time to go to New York. Our peers were all in that group, people who had graduated to New York — we had a shared understanding.

**SC:** To go back to the tape and the catalogue being pulled from the AGO show, it's interesting that your work was seen as threatening — the work you presented was so self-reflexive and the institution you're attacking is primarily the competitive capitalist spirit into which you'd been socialized. This spirit is manifested in the institution of art, but it's not a direct attack on the AGO or —

KB: At that moment, the idea of being an artist and pursuing art for its own sake was considered radical; the idea was that art was a radical activity in and of itself. Artists would generally see themselves as progressive within society and see what they were doing as contributing to, in a modernist sense, the development of the world. Within that context to turn around and say, "wait a minute, this is a problem, it isn't what it appears to be" was perceived as shocking, whereas today, we have a critical discourse about the art world that's more common.

So yes, today you might go after the AGO because of how their collection is put together or any number of other concerns. But at that point our critique was about our whole perception of art and the art world serving society. The conversations happening in New York and Europe weren't happening at the same scale in Toronto and certainly not at the AGO. So our show prompted several trustees to leave the AGO and the donors pulled their names from the gallery our work was shown in, for them it was threatening.

CC: Even in New York people were reacting to the show and especially the catalogue, one time — you tell the story Karl.

KB: It was great, one time we were at the bar with Larry [Lawrence] Weiner and William Wegman and a bunch of them, I can't remember, they had the book with them and went through our critique. In the book we talked about Wegman patenting his dog, making it his signature, and they raked us over the coals for betraying the art world. How dare we!

CC: There are always critiques from the outside, but to be on the inside, to be friends with these people and then to share your critique outside of the bar, outside of the groups, that's a real no-no.

KB: It's like police culture, you don't rat on your fellow cop. It was a good reaction, I think it's because people want to believe that art in and of itself is progressive.

CC: Our show built from the kinds of things that we were arguing about in bars and in our home. Showing it in Toronto was only a fluke, remember Roald thought he was getting a minimalist sculpture show — the critical conceptual movement hadn't hit Toronto yet, it was only 3 or 5 years old, so to put it in the gallery here, people lined up to see it and were yapping about it because it wasn't happening here, especially in a place like the AGO, it got people stirred up.

**SC:** Several times in the audio you express a fear that the work has a narcissism or navel-gazing quality because you two are at the centre of it, you are grilled by your peers about this as well. The work is about your situation and conditions — you're rejecting a set of "universal ideas" you see contained in the dominant forms of art around you — but still you feared taking up the specific, and the problems in and around you.

KB: I think part of it came out of a dialogue between the two of us, informed by Carole's experience with the Women's Ad Hoc Committee and the feminist critique that was developing at that time. We were thinking about the male dominated art world and we tried to tackle these conversations, seeing how the ideologies we wanted to dismantle were present in our lives. But also in a sense we were looking at notions of self-expression that art was about the unique individual, the genius, it came out of your innate whatever. Focusing on ourselves was a critique of that concept itself and once we'd done it, we said that's it — time to move on.

CC: When you're part of a collective that is how you go through things, that was the first and last work we made that was just about us. It's us in the work but it comes from group conversations.

In the women's movement at that time, Lucy Lippard was leading the New York art feminist group I was



CAROLE CONDÉ AND KARL BEVERIDGE, *S/GNS*, 1975

involved in and one of the things we were talking about was how it felt to be an artist yourself but have your husband getting far more recognition. The group allowed us to think about how we worked together.

**SC:** In the work you take a radical position, but the radical position is very tied to uncertainty, to knowing that you're no longer willing to accept the status quo. You're trying to find a way in both life and art practice to continue to produce, but to not produce the same kinds of things.

KB: Yeah, even though we were developing a critique, we weren't doing it from a fixed position, we were exploring. We were a part of a Marxist group and a feminist group. Our thinking was no longer tied to a single conversation.

CC: We were a part of Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, which took place in the Paula Cooper Gallery once a month. One time we had Artforum give talks and the audience lambasted the shit out of them. There

was this spirit of critique happening in SoHo, and we were very much a part of that scene. We lived just down the street from these meeting places, Ornette Coleman lived around the corner, you know it was a specific moment — when it was illegal to live there. That kind of social processing gave you the feeling you could take on something new, in other words you need that kind of community, that social context, in order to make a movement or forward a critique and believe that it can gain traction. We were trying out something new and collectivity allowed for that kind of thinking.

KB: What we saw in New York, and it was happening in Europe already, was that people were seriously critiquing the modernist project and I think that signaled in '75 in New York a shift to a postmodern sensibility — that's what we were becoming a piece of.

CC: We were also very involved in Art and Language where Mel Ramsden was from England and Ian Burn was from Australia, and we ended up with Joseph Kosuth and all those characters coming in and there was a sense that it was international, well WASP international, it was the 70s.

We met around two Ping-Pong tables sometimes every day for a whole week starting at nine in the morning and going to four in the afternoon. We were a collective working together to process what was around us. The group extended to non-artists, partners of artists, mostly wives in those days, but they were included in the meetings because they were a part of the community and their concerns belonged at the table. Karl and I were not the first ones to think about what it meant for a couple to work together. Making art together was unusual, but thinking about being in the art world together was something our group was concerned with.

**SC:** A lot of the materials I've been collecting in relation to this show: the sign work, the audio recording, the book, the video skits, the banners and your performance for the film *Struggle in New York* were all happening at the same time. You're using some of the same language to ask many of the same questions, but using radically different forms, and a lot of them are tied to photography, recording and print, which are very efficient forms, especially when you're making an exhibition on a four-month timeline. I'm interested in this experimentation, leaving your comfort zone of one medium — as you were asking questions and dealing with uncertainty as content you were also experimenting in form at the same time.

CC: Well the reason we ended up doing silkscreen is because our son and daughter were involved in a community printing co-op four blocks away from our home, we learned because we were part of the community centre.

KB: Having stopped making sculpture, we were unsure what we were doing, it raised the practical question of what form two people can work on collaboratively and also what kind of form can articulate content, because content hadn't been a real part of the

modernist project, certainly not the work we made as a part of it.

Our exploration was to find what kind of forms could help us move forward. We'd meet people who were trying different media and we'd think about what we could do with them to solve the problems we were facing.

**SC:** I'm interested in the way your work reads as a manifesto of sorts, yet the language is quite simple, everyday and accessible.

KB: Part of that was our reaction to Art and Language itself which, when you try to read what they produced, is almost totally obscure — in some ways similar to the formalist language of art criticism at the time.

Our use of language is connected to our ideas of doing a cartoon; trying to find form and language that is accessible. One of the things in these critiques of the modernist art world was that it was totally opaque and alienating and illegible to the general public.

CC: If you want to tell a story that resonates with many people you have to think about the language you use. People say our work is didactic, we had the realization that if we're trying to make change, we need to make something that is legible to the people we're trying to make change with.

# Kajsa Dahlberg

**SC: I'm interested in the way you investigate systems for thinking about the body as a device that executes movements that are tied to temporal values. This mode of thinking seems very tied to the invention of cinema and the proto-cinema work of people like Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey — there's something cinematic about tethering the rhythms of a body to a clock or a series of frames.**

KD: The history of labour was greatly changed by the advent of cinema. It allowed for the invention of new ways of measuring work like the Method-Time Measurement (MTM) system, but it also changed the way we see the body. Another parallel to the development of cinematography and moving images is neurology and the scientific preoccupation with unproductive bodies: those that refuse or are unable to coordinate themselves within ideas of "productivity."

**SC: There's a temptation to read your film *Reach, Grasp, Move, Position, Apply Force* as a history of motion studies, work optimization and ergonomicization, but I think you're actually looking at the tools and services you engage with in life and work as products of this history; you're positioning yourself in relation to these ideas of labour. You're asking questions as someone living with and negotiating those conditions, but also maybe trying to collect materials to disassemble the complicated infrastructures surrounding you, to look backwards and forwards to try to create a way to think outside of this.**

KD: The initial idea was to explicitly relate issues of time to my own practice and investigate the working conditions of the film I was making. The motion studies and systems for optimizing labour came into the project as a parallel story because they were something that I came across so many times throughout the process. The MTM system, at a first glance, seems like such an old fashioned way of organizing labour, but in truth it's having a huge renaissance today.

I wanted try my own body against these systems of organizing bodies: to investigate where they come from and what they leave behind, while also using them as a way to think about the medium of moving images. But there was definitely an implicit wish to disturb normative historical narratives of progress and productivity — to separate the optimized motions from their common use.

**SC: There's something interesting in the double language of ergonomics and efficiency, which somehow perpetuates the myth of a "healthy happy work force" being a workforce that is fully optimized and efficient. When you talk to the Executive Director of the German MTM Association, he says that the MTM system stems from studying a group of bricklayers, some of whom were exhausted at the end of the workday while others were happy and energetic — that the goal of optimizing their bodies was to improve their working conditions.**

KD: Yes, he was talking a lot about ergonomics in relation to MTM, and this seems like a way to justify a system that is quite brutal. To say that it's about sustaining your body hides the more oppressive sides of the system. It would be interesting to learn if there is anything like a revolutionary ergonomic movement, or any kind of resistance in this field — ergonomics seems like such a benevolent concept: the "good way" or the "right way" of using the body, that in the end reinforces the idea of work as a naturalized activity.

**SC: And the MTM system works to make the body a machine, to make it no longer a whole but a series of component parts: the eyes focus and the arm reaches, everything has a time value attached to it. There's something interesting about the way that labour is divided in the Ford-Taylorist model that MTM came out of: not only that every worker does a small task and together the whole is formed, but also that the body is divided into its component parts.**

KD: Absolutely. The MTM system is based on the idea that all manual labour can be divided into 17 basic movements: reach, grasp, move, position and so on... In that respect it's almost set up to look like a kind of anatomy — an anatomy of labour. But, of course, it is an instrumentalization of the body under capitalism; a deconstruction of the worker that makes us relate to the body in totally new ways. It is very difficult to think of the body outside of these systems anymore.

**SC: It's interesting that the Time**

**Measurement Unit (TMU) of the MTM system is directly linked to the shutter speed and frame rate of a film camera. The way you begin *Reach, Grasp* with the Lumière Brothers' film *Workers Leaving the Factory*, seems fitting, it's this banal thing, people leaving work, but it's bodies in motion in relation to labour.**

KD: There are strong connections between movements of the body, labour and moving images. There is a book by Virgilio Tosi called *Cinema Before Cinema: The Origins of Scientific Cinematography* that focuses on cinema being invented as a way to understand motion rather than something coming from the entertainment industry, which has been the prevalent narrative. The Ford-Taylorist way of organizing work, under which the motion studies were developed, is based on filming the actions of workers as a way to break down movements and to be able to analyze and compare them.

It's interesting to think about the way we employ terms such as use, progression and growth in the temporal organization of everyday life. Elisabeth Freeman, for instance, uses the term "chrono-normativity" as a way to describe "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity." This chrono-normativity hides the fact that history is nonlinear and hence full of temporal and spatial discontinuities, gaps and absences.

**SC: It's strange the way this Ford-Taylorist kind of thinking is still being applied in an environment where labour has so dramatically changed. Even the frame rate of film is different than that of video, yet TMUs still correspond to film.**



**But the more boundless the work, the more we could also interpret him as oppressed**

KAJSA DAHLBERG, STILL FROM *FIFTY MINUTES IN HALF AN HOUR*, DIGITAL VIDEO, 2013

KD: It makes one suspect that things haven't actually changed that much. The Ford-Taylorist model has blended very well into the New Public Management ethos that has been ongoing since the 80s. These work optimization systems are not only present in places like Amazon, they're used in hospitals, offices and universities, so it's not scaling back at all; it's moving into every possible workplace.

**SC: And that is maybe an interesting place to think about your other film, *Fifty Minutes in Half an Hour*. Would you mind giving a little context to Dacapo, the consulting firm you bring in to the project and what they do?**

KD: I came across Dacapo when I was researching a factory in Odense, Denmark. I found this radio program from the 1960s in which workers from this factory were discussing issues of labour and their working conditions together with the management in a kind of roundtable discussion. I thought it would be interesting to make a new version of this conversation in the same factory as it still exists and operates today. Since the 60s

it has grown from being a small family-run factory to a multinational industry. I thought I would do a comparative study of the factory in the two time periods, but after a long period of negotiation I wasn't allowed to talk to the workers.

In this research I met Dacapo's founder Lone Thellesen, who had worked in that factory's HR department for many years. While she worked there the workers had tried using workers' theatre to talk about some of the labour issues and it was quite successful. Shortly after this Lone left her job there to start Dacapo. The consulting firm builds from Forum Theatre, a model developed by Augusto Boal, also known as Theatre of the Oppressed, which uses theater in a community context to fight oppression and raise awareness. Its basic idea is that if you practice something in fiction it's easier to make a change in reality. Lone met Augusto Boal several times and he, of course, didn't like their recuperation of his strategies. However, Dacapo's model is set up to help companies undergoing big changes or facing labour problems; if a company has to fire a

lot of people they might ask Dacapo to come in and do re-enactments or theatre pieces as a way to work through conflicts surrounding the layoffs. As it says on their webpage, they facilitate “processes of renewal and change.” It’s very easy to criticize what they do — it’s absurd in a way.

**SC:** I think the origin and ideology of worker's theatre is in a position of empowering the worker, whereas with Dacapo it inverts into this psychological pacifier, at least within the kinds of exercises you do in the film. It stops escalation and lets the workers and management come to a slightly more shared perspective, but it's a perspective that could only make micro-changes and seems to erase the possibility of holistic change or restructuring.

KD: Yes, it's not initiated by the workers, Dacapo isn't a political force that tries to make working conditions better for workers, they're doing this to make money, they're a consulting firm masquerading as a theatre troupe. On the other hand, what they do poses some interesting questions around the relationship between art and labour.

**SC:** In *Reach, Grasp* you also work with “experts” and you are asking for explanation and calling on their “expertise” but there is again a very clear tension at play. It's not a tension of you saying “no, you're making things worse for the worker and better for the exploiters,” it's not didactic, it's a tension through framing.

KD: I talk to two MTM experts in *Reach, Grasp*, one who talks about the history of the technique and the other who demonstrates the MTM formula for filming with my camera. They are so committed to believing in the system, in a way they're quite inspiring

people to listen to, very enthusiastic about their work and convinced it's making the world a better place. It's very tricky to negotiate this, when you invite somebody into your project as a sort of “bad guy” but on the other hand think that it's important to understand their position. So I think the tension you're talking about is my attempt to negotiate this. It's not just that they are “bad guys,” I'm trying to use what they say in a way that makes the issues at stake more complex.

**SC:** And they can tell us a lot about ourselves, their thinking is also a product of something that we are participating in.

KD: Yes. It's interesting, in *Reach, Grasp*, I interviewed a worker outside the Amazon warehouse in Leipzig who complains about how it takes so long to walk to the lunchroom from the part of the factory where you clock in and out. He says that he loses a considerable part of his lunch break just by moving through this huge space. He explains that he has timed how long it takes to walk between each part of the factory and that he presented it to the management as a complaint. He used the exact same method that the management uses to measure worker's performance as a way to try to fight back.

**SC:** Yes, the whole logic of the Amazon warehouse is to know exactly how long it takes to walk from one point to another to efficiently ship an order. For the workers to use the same logic to say that the architecture of the building is stealing their time...

KD: After listening to these MTM people one starts to suspect it's all part of their calculations. It's difficult to imagine that they would be so aware of how long it takes to

walk a certain amount of meters to pick up a book but not think about the fact that the workers have to go to the lunchroom or the bathroom. It opens up a whole conversation about chronopolitics that would be interesting to continue working with in the future.

# *John Hampton*

**Sam Cotter:** Though it's a little bit counterintuitive, I think it might be good to start at the present and work backward. Right now you're starting to bring materials to the gallery and we're working to find language to use around them. We've come up with terms like "initiated by Duane Linklater, authorship of this piece has been given to John Hampton" which in some ways sound like contractual language. I'm interested in some of the reasons why we have to be so precise about language around this project.

John Hampton: That negotiation is a weird one. It really is about negotiating a contract — because there are standards, accepted contracts for the relationship between curator, artist and gallery.

There are agreed-upon standards that don't require those negotiations for crediting artists, it's often as simple as putting a name beside the work. We've entered a strange grey area that's unfamiliar to both of us, because of this passing of authorship we need to reevaluate how we credit and relate to each other.

I'm glad that we don't have to do this every time, but it's useful and important to do occasionally. To reevaluate the systems we're using. I think that this is something you're doing in the broader concept of the show in many different ways.

**SC:** But the relationship between artist and curator is more complicated in this project, your initial entry point into this project with Duane was actually with an action you performed as a curator. You edited the Cape Spear Wikipedia page to add an "In Popular Culture" section containing Duane's project. It was a gesture of curatorial care; you performed it as a curator with an institutional affiliation, while at work I believe.

JH: Yes, it's an unconventional dynamic we're in now. At the moment I consider myself to be more of a curator than an artist and you are more of an artist than a curator. In doing that action I was working in a curatorial role in relation to Duane's piece, but I'm now in a position where I have to care for the project and have been given authorship of it. It represents a real transitional moment for how my artistic practice exists; I've always framed it as being a very curatorial practice, and it is really entering into an exploration of what curatorial acts are and can be. In some ways I'm taking on a role that is the classical sense of a curator: that of a caretaker, maintaining an object, which is actually a territory — a physical territory, Cape Spear — but Duane describes it as a conceptual territory.

It's funny because on the Cape Spear Wikipedia page there's a list of all the keepers of the lighthouse, which has been handed on from keeper to keeper. It's interesting to think

what Duane's role was as the keeper of that conceptual territory that he "founded."

**SC:** The way Duane explained this transition to me was that he saw the project as conceptual ground that could be shared between Indigenous people over time and that it had room for them to do what they wanted with it. Beyond the authorship of the piece transferring to you, you've made reference to having several duties in relation to the project. I'm wondering what you consider a duty.

JH: It's within the idea of caretaking; the duties include maintaining the project's presence on Wikipedia. Rather than re-performing the act that Duane did which was a five-year long performance, I'm maintaining the action I tried to do in my first edit — recording Duane's intervention as part of the historical record.

This also involves recording something someone wrote on the Cape Spear "Talk Page" — it's a wonderful description of why Duane was doing his project in response to another user's long "Repeated Vandalism" entry chronicling all of Duane's edits to the page.

Interestingly the person who wrote this deleted it themselves, they were either embarrassed about how they were framing the work or they decided that they wanted to leave the "Repeated Vandalism" article as its own "pure" record.

**SC: The Wikipedia editors who have been deleting all of Duane's contributions for the past five years are people who obviously have some research skills and ability to fact check, yet they refuse to engage with him. They often talk about his actions as a joke and can't understand it as an artistic gesture.**

JH: I think the motivations of the users are individualistic, but all rooted around the ideas of the purity of the encyclopedia. Wikipedia is founded in the same ideology of the enlightenment and the colonial project, a pursuit of new lands and new knowledge, framing them as access and ownership of a territory or body of knowledge governed democratically by “altruistic” people that value knowledge above everything else.

I think that this is a really fascinatingly contradictory motivation for the erasure of Indigenous voices, histories and populations; removing other ways of thinking and existing — an erasure of knowledge in pursuit of the preservation of knowledge.

The other aspect in there is the tension between Conceptual Art and general audiences. Obviously these people consider themselves to be well educated, and I’m sure many of them are, but even the smartest amongst us can have immense difficulty with Conceptual Art; it’s a different way of thinking. There are Indigenous

epistemologies and knowledges; and also conceptual histories and knowledges in the project, each tied to different ways of thinking and knowing.

When you look at it through that lens it becomes almost a parody of how the general public conceives of conceptual practices as jokes or mischief. It reminds me of being in performance art classes where students knew about MTV’s *Jackass* before seeing Chris Burden’s work — from their point of reference Burden’s works are pranks, just some dude doing extreme activities for shock value.

There are all these ways people try to understand conceptual art through the popular culture that they are familiar with. I think that’s what the Wikipedia editors are doing, they think that Duane’s performative act is just trolling.

**SC: To describe the action, you and I use the logic of performance and Conceptual Art and I think that's where it belongs, but for these moderators to deal with it they have to use the logic of spam and trolling.**

JH: There’s something interesting in the value of a transgressive act; in the history of conceptualism transgressive acts are valued but in a colonial structure they are policed. In Indigenous epistemologies — Duane is coming from an Omaskêko Cree perspective and I’m coming from a Chickasaw/Lakota/Annishinaabe one — there are productive transgressors and tricksters, the coyote is a familiar one. There are stories of how pushing boundaries, expectations and systems can lead to productive outcomes or generate new knowledge that couldn’t be achieved by working within the systems you are taught.



DUANE LINKLATER → JOHN HAMPTON, SUNRISE AT CAPE SPEAR NEWFOUNDLAND, RECORDED BY DUANE LINKLATER 3/10/2011

**SC: Wikipedia has a utopian element, its mandate is that anyone can be a contributor and editor, there are no word counts and no limits to the amount of information that it can hold. But the user, Srnec, who removed your initial edit to the page gave only the two word explanation “not notable,” so there must be a system of evaluation for what is considered relevant. Duane’s actions were removed because they were framed as personal, self-promotion or vandalism by various editors, while your act was simply “not notable,” which seems like a way of acknowledging that it complied to all the standards but is unimportant.**

JH: Speaking to the utopian end, I feel like Wikipedia is one of the last utopian havens of the Web 2.0 ideology of a radical collaborationist model of the internet — free access to information in which all the users can be content producers.

All of the other major portals have been corporatized while Wikipedia is still a not-for-profit. But that ideology is also the ideology of the free market, that Wikipedia will regulate itself. But the market “regulates itself” because people are self-interested. In Wikipedia it’s the editor’s disinterest that ensures the regulation, there’s an assumption that people are inherently “good” and that there will be more people who believe in this utopia than want to destroy it.

There is one edit early on in the Cape Spear page’s lifespan where someone replaced the page with Parappa the Rapper lyrics. I looked at the edit history of that IP address and their first edit was that same day, it was something like adding “hello” to a page. Their next edit was more like “oh my god, I didn’t think this would save, I just clicked edit and it’s all gone” and the next one was like

"you shouldn't put in that edit thing because people like me will just come in and delete all the articles," and then they went to many different articles and replaced them with nonsense. But all of their edits were reverted and it seems they quickly lost interest in Wikipedia.

As a user you very rarely encounter something like that, even though the possibility exists, and everyone knows that the internet is a terrible place. If you open up the comments section on Aboriginal news articles on CBC (before they were removed) it's filled with the most evil garbage; people use the anonymity of the internet to spout these things.

**SC:** It becomes hard to believe that these are even real people because they're saying the most dastardly hateful things with such a wild sense of authority. They've decided this is their place and occupy it with their hate.

JH: And somehow that energy hasn't destroyed Wikipedia; it's sort of mindboggling. But Wikipedia is maintained through tapping into existing power structures that we have internalized. All of the radical potentials of the internet — where we can create any world we want — only recreate the world we know.

**SC:** The Cape Spear project, in its new life as a thing or space that can be transferred between people and changed, it has a generative potential that is implicit but unrealized in Wikipedia.

JH: I think it has a bigger potential impact on Conceptual Art practices than on Wikipedia because of that idea of authorship. I've seen other projects where authorship has been

transferred between people, but the way that Duane framed the encounter between us was something other than those interactions. Part of this was that there was a mutual understanding from Indigenous traditions of passing on cultural objects.

**SC:** Yes, and I think it can include objects, techniques and oral traditions.

JH: Yeah, the idea of being a carrier of a song, or the keeper of a story or a way of carving, there are all these different cultural objects that get passed on and are gifted and carried. It's an interesting way of thinking of the potential of an Indigenous methodology for contemporary practices.

**SC:** There are at least three Cape Spears in the project: the one that exists inside the conceptual parameters of the project, which is a potentially generative space and a space that can hold many ideas and involve many people; there's the Wikipedia page which is the site of intervention and performance; and there is the physical space of Cape Spear itself which you have never been to. In this exhibition, a piece of that place is coming into the gallery, a handful of dirt from Cape Spear is coming by mail through a very mediated process and I'm wondering how these spaces can sit together.

JH: That's the multiplicity of objects: a rock can be simultaneously a collection of atoms, a paperweight, a chunk of a wall — like the Berlin Wall piece we sat next to last time we talked. Cape Spear is all of those things and many more. Even this conceptual territory of Cape Spear is a very specific one; there are so many different conceptual territories of that place, of the people who haven't been recorded, of animal life, of water and rock history.

I'm accessing the physical space through a conceptual entry point. I think that this is part of the impulse for wanting a piece of Cape Spear present in the gallery, pulled in by using this network of people circulating around it.

The dirt, rock and lighthouse have their own material existence, but I guess Wikipedia does as well. It's a material object that people can experience as a real thing. It moves and evolves over time and has a life similar to the physical space, and I have experienced this space and made an impression on it.

A stone has an embedded history of its formation, of its interaction with water, it can be read and studied and you can see many different stories. Wikipedia has been designed as an organic object that evolves and changes over time and within itself records its own history. There's a clear parallel between geological formation and knowledge formation and it's interesting how legible the Wikipedia history is; anyone can view the sedimentation and erosion of edits that led to the present page.

**SC:** From now on both you and Duane appear permanently in the contributors list on the Wikipedia page regardless of whether any of your edits remain, you're now contributors for—

JH: However long Wikipedia lasts.

# Juan Ortiz-Apuy

**Sam Cotter:** We originally had been talking about showing an older work of yours, *Lovers II (Hunter & Kenmore)* or “*Sculpture is made with two instruments, some supports, and pretty air*”, I’m interested in the relationship you see between that work and the new work: they use similar materials, but they’re quite different to me. The Lovers work, which consists of a humidifier and a dehumidifier that share a tank, has a physical presence, yet seems almost invisible. When I saw it at Galerie Antoine Ertaskiran in 2013, it could have passed for gallery furniture rather than a sculpture and intervention into the space. In *Guaria Morada*, though the humidifiers and dehumidifier are still counteracting each other, they become a generative mechanism, part of an ecology.

Juan Ortiz-Apuy: It evolved out of the discussion we were having around ideas of negotiation and contradiction. I wanted to remake that same paradoxical situation of Lovers in relationship to my ideas of Costa Rica — I’ve been in Canada for 14 years and I haven’t made a piece specifically about Costa Rica before. Spending so much time outside has given me a distance to look back on the country, I wanted to take the idea of being set in a contradiction, of being in a constant state of struggle or a perpetual system of negotiation, and then apply it to my ideas of Costa Rica or even Latin America in general.

**SC:** Yes, and that’s where this particular orchid comes in, it’s the national flower of Costa Rica.

JOA: Yes, symbolically they do represent Costa Rica — I think it can become a metaphor for developing countries, the idea of being stuck in a struggle for perpetual development. There are forces prompting growth and also forces holding it back.

**SC:** I think in some ways that the humidifier and dehumidifier then become these forces that are both nurturing and threatening, they’re representative of a vested interest of invisible but geographically and economically specific outside forces acting on a site.

JOA: And to return to the metaphor then, the humidifier and dehumidifier as you mentioned are literally forces pushing the orchids to develop, but also holding them back and creating dependency — I mean those forces in the case of Costa Rica are about economics, foreign influence and corruption — there’s a long history of outside manipulation and control.

**SC:** In some ways I feel guilty, because I think I’ve put a lot of symbolic pressure on your work in the exhibition. Because of the nature of the piece it becomes something that can morph to stand in for other concerns of negotiating influence — even the concerns of other artists’ work and the institution itself. But there’s something interesting about this too, I think one reading of your work that might come up frequently is that it is acting as a model of the artist-run centre system — the invisible working bodies that perform a circular labour around a precarious orchid

which is maybe standing in for the art-object or the exhibition or the public presence of the institution.

JOA: Yeah, and when we first talked about the exhibition I decided I really wanted to engage in ideas of negotiation. My initial interest in the piece and in working with these materials was that there is the possibility for it to stand in for many situations — it’s important to me that there are a lot of entry points. But there are signals there that give more specific connotations on a close reading.

**SC:** I think another thing about these materials, and the materials of many other of your works is that you create poetic and symbolic gestures out of everyday, and highly commercial, materials. I think there’s something interesting about your work as a poetry of late capitalism.

But another aspect of the piece that I think is quite interesting is the way in which we read the exchange between the humidifier and dehumidifier as a kind of null. But that there are contradictions to that, one being that there is the possibility of the orchid being maintained and surviving as long as the system functions, and another that placing these objects in an art gallery is both threatening and precarious — it’s a space which needs to be as neutral as possible, and you’re throwing these forces into it which do not have 100% efficiency, they’re not completely canceling each other out. Your work is actually changing the space itself.

**It's a shared space, so it has the potential to physically transform other work in the exhibition.**

JOA: Yeah, one of the things I really appreciate about this show is that at this point my work is still an experiment and I don't know exactly what will happen to the orchids after a week or two, let alone the other works in the show. I'm setting up a system and I don't know what the result will be, I know it's fragile, but the exhibition has become a place to test these possibilities.

**SC: And I guess that the effort is genuine, there's real work happening between the machines. But, unlike the Lovers piece in which there is at least the possibility that it might be able to function undisturbed in perpetuity, here you've separated the two devices. In this work you acknowledge that they have to be serviced, the tank of the dehumidifier needs to be poured into the tank of the humidifier, someone has to do this to keep the cycle going.**

JOA: I felt like by separating the two, it opened the work to include the space around it, implicating the gallery more. I thought about what should be in that space, what belongs in that process of exchange, and then the orchids, with their air roots, seemed natural.

I wanted the work to use the gallery a lot, not only the staff to care for it to an extent, but the lighting, the air in the gallery, it's a very artificial system that is trying to maintain this very fragile flower that is completely out of its natural habitat. But it's also in Canada, you know, it's a rainforest orchid so it needs a degree of artificiality to maintain and care for it.

The work is a proposal, these plants only bloom once a year, they work throughout the whole year to create a new growth and each growth has only one flower, and once it flowers it will never flower again. It's a very long and labourious process just to create this one flower.

**SC: I wonder if we could maybe talk about some of your ideas around circularity. You often think about things that begin and end in the same place and the plant follows that form again – a labourious cycle that ends only to begin again.**

JOA: I'm interested in ideas of failure, things that repeat themselves ad infinitum. When something begins and ends in the same place, which is a big part of ideas of failure, it's always changed by the process — when it returns something has been lost or gained in the process.

**SC: In thinking about measures of success, and alternative measures of success, is there**

**a measure of success within the logic of the project that's perhaps beyond the plant flowering? That is probably the most obvious marker.**

JOA: Yeah, that's a really good question and I don't know if I have an answer to it, I generally don't think a lot about success but more about the process. The transformations that happen along the way end up being more important than the result. It's not actually important to me that it does produce a flower, but to make the proposition of the system itself, to propose this contradiction, this paradox.

**SC: The project doesn't have a clear endpoint, we talked previously about what it would mean if the plants all died during the show, and how this wouldn't necessarily be a failure, though I'm sure it's not best-case scenario.**

JOA: I don't think it will get to that point, but I'll probably be a little bit disappointed if it happens. My interest is in maximum effort



JUAN ORTIZ-APUY, GUARIA MORADA (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2016.

and minimum result: this project is a system that is working a lot, working even when the gallery is closed, but produces very little.

This piece is so tied to Latin America, failed policies, failed utopias, failed modernisms, a constant struggle to arrive in a modernity that never comes. Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* comes to mind, there's that incredible scene where they drag the boat over the mountain as a shortcut to get to these rubber plants, and when it crosses the peak they can no longer control it and the ship rolls down the mountain and goes back down the river.

**SC: But there's also something interesting in *Fitzcarraldo* in the way that it upsets Western logic. Despite his eccentricities, the character Fitzgerald has this imperial colonial logic: that his thinking and determination is beyond everyone else's so he deserves to get the rubber and ultimately bring the opera house to the country. It's a thinking of clear linear steps. But it seems like the landscape itself as well as its peoples are conspiring against him.**

JOA: Yeah, and those are related to the title of the show for me. Those are the working conditions of the region, being caught in this paradoxical push and pull: so much effort to progress while at the same time there are all these other forces preventing anything from happening.

**SC: It's a cycle that's difficult if not impossible to escape from, there have been so many points at which it's been declared that corruption is over, independence from external influence has been reached, but that's really at the far edge of possibility.**

JOA: I remember when I was in high school we started using the term "developing country" because third world was no longer

politically correct. I find the term very interesting because, after all these years it's still a developing country, this kind of ties in with the piece, being stuck in this state of developing; there are all these things preventing it from actually developing, there is this failure and repetition; it's going to be a forever-developing country.

I learned a bit about the history of this orchid and it was actually selected to be the national flower in the late 1930s, because Argentina had built this garden called the "Garden of Peace" and they asked all the countries in the Americas to send their national flower. Costa Rica didn't have one, so we just selected one on the spot. It's kind of interesting because so much of the identity of Costa Rica feels so manufactured, it's a young country and so many things seem so constructed. It's apropos that the national flower would be selected on the basis of somebody else needing one for a garden in Argentina.

In its natural habitat this is a resilient plant, and that's why it was probably chosen, it's both very fragile and a fighter. It has struggled and survives, all it needs is a little nook in a tree and it will produce this magnificent purple flower.

**SC: I know it's partially the timing of the exhibition, but I think it's interesting that the orchid will not be in bloom during the show. It reads as a deliberate gesture to show it in a time of growth without reward, or before the reward — it draws attention to its precarity.**

JOA: It definitely has to do with the timing of the exhibition, but it would have also been so flashy to be in full bloom with purple flowers everywhere, it would have been so resolved and I'm more interested in the proposition with an unknown result.

**SC: Yes, it's put into an environment and we don't know whether it will nurture the plant or destroy it, it's so much more interesting than the finality and legibility of the flower, it's the beginning of the system.**

JOA: If it was in bloom the message would be that the system works, I like the tension, there is no tension in a system that works perfectly.

# ***Joshua Schwebel***

**Sam Cotter:** From the beginning of our conversations around this project you talked about labour contracts as the point in which an institution defines its relationship to its employees. But within non-profits and small institutions in general I think ideas of “the institution” become blurry. At TPW I feel as though in many ways I’m the institution, or rather that the whole staff is, maybe there’s something interesting here about being simultaneously the institution and the employee.

Joshua Schwebel: I think even more generally all artists are “the institution” and “the employee” at the same time. Once you think about something that lasts outside of yourself, something shared and more permanent, there’s a level of investment, compromise and ambivalence that likely isn’t beneficial to you. In my practice I often poke at the meeting place of those two value systems, where they intersect and contradict each other.

The project I did with Bruce Barber — the director of my MFA program at NSCAD — was aiming for the point at which he is both a representative of the institution and an artist. The works I did were asking him to evaluate which value systems he prioritized in a given moment: whether a project’s conceptual gestures would warrant flexibility and understanding from him as an artist, or whether his institutional responsibilities would overtake the more artistic and poetic framework.

I’m interested in situations in which we’re negotiating the institution within us, what I’m trying to do in my work is put people in situations where they have to think about the order of those allegiances.

**SC:** Within the project, you’ve framed the labour of people working in artist-run culture as a form of subsidy, perhaps subsidizing the larger project of culture in general. There’s not really a person or organization that you can point a finger at for why this subsidy exists, there’s no namable perpetrator of this exploitation.

JS: It’s an endless problem; ultimately it’s a lack of funding and organization, a lack of oversight and accountability on the part of granting agencies, that granting agencies are not responsible for the employment conditions of artist-run centres. I think anybody who really gets involved in artist-run culture as an employee has to accept that a large part of the work that they do is not going to be paid.

I think it’s a real problem that the funders and granting agencies aren’t accountable to the staff for the working conditions in artist-run culture because no other body has the power to do anything about it. If there’s any kind of political conclusion to this project it is that there should be a union of artist-run centre employees because the situation won’t improve if there’s no organized body advocating for it.

**SC:** Workers Arts and Heritage Centre and Mayworks Festival are both members of local CUPE chapters. It’s interesting that in the two centres focused on labour that the workers have managed to organize in this way.

JS: ARCA and IMAA [Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference, and the Independent Media Arts Alliance] talk about this in their advocacy work but are very limited in terms of what they can do. As advocacy organizations they can make recommendations, but can’t achieve anything like this at the level of the arts councils because the councils themselves are only responsible for a portion of the funding to any centre. Every centre finds their own funding sources and sets their own pay scales, staffing requirements, contracts and job descriptions.

It’s very atomized from centre to centre and I see this as part of the reason why working conditions are inadequate. Another reason is because the work force in artist-run culture is often very young and made up of people who are very motivated to do the work anyway, despite the low pay. There isn’t much ground for negotiation either, because most people are not that dissatisfied, but there’s a high turnover after two or three years, people realize that this isn’t getting them anywhere or they burn out and move on, it’s a frustrating system to achieve long term changes within.

**SC:** It seems that entrepreneurial activity by non-profits is regarded as a strength, but

**to me it seems tied to de-waging, debt and intangible promise of reward, which I think are things that come from the private sector. Cultural capital is not capital or compensation for time worked.**

JS: You can't eat cultural capital.

**SC: So to use private sector language for a public sector non-profit cultural institution...**

JS: But centres are being required and rewarded for having private sector funding. It's not so one or the other.

**SC: But these funds are often tied to a specific project. They offer the possibility that you could be in a more advantageous position as an organization or have increased visibility but often mean more work without any more compensation.**

JS: That's something I've been struggling to articulate about this situation, because a lot of the options for additional funding, both public and private, are project based and not operational funds — you can't improve working conditions through project funds.

The working conditions in artist-run centres are so lacking in support, so lacking in visibility. It's a well-known problem, but there's no mobilization around it as an issue.

**SC: Part of it is of course the classic “creative class” struggle of loving what you do and allowing — or even wanting — life and work to blur completely; wanting to communicate, be creative and foster dialogue with people makes it difficult to quantify the work you’re doing with a dollar amount.**

JS: As artists and cultural workers, it's engrained in us to do things that are anti-market and anti-capitalist and so it feels

somehow against our politics to expect to be paid properly. It feels like negotiating a fee is a mercenary gesture. It's hard to look at what we do as actual work, work that's not always benefiting us.

What we're doing may not have a commercial value but it's still important, and it supplements the cultural landscape of the country. Part of this devaluation prevents us from seeing how much the work we do is needed and how significant the loss would be if it were withdrawn.

**SC: I'm wondering if we can talk about the relationship between care and critique in your work, because this relationship seems to keep altering the frame around this project. The critique is rooted in a larger systemic problem and the care manifests at a more interpersonal level (not that you don't care about the larger problem) where the work involves specific individuals, the staff of TPW.**

JS: I think that I always try to do a care-driven critique. I think that criticality comes from love and frustration, from wanting to contribute, to strengthen. There is always a balance, I never want only to provoke and antagonize, it has to be something careful and precise, it has to respond to the situation. I would never go into a project with the sole intention of antagonism, I want to express sincere care through a process of negotiating with the entity I see an issue arising from or existing in.

There is a personal negotiation in all of this; people are representing the institution but are also social beings. I don't want to make people feel too vulnerable, damaged or violated, I'm not the kind of artist who wants to simply mine people for a sensational thing to show.

**SC: The original gesture you proposed for this exhibition, to show the employment contracts of the staff of Gallery TPW as a way of talking about employment conditions within artist-run centres, was something that felt in some ways threatening and made each employee of TPW to one extent or another feel a degree of vulnerability.**

JS: That wasn't something that I anticipated, but realizing that has led me to redirect the project. Intimidator is not a role I want to play in making the work, certainly not at the artist-run culture level. I don't think people in artist-run centres, at TPW, are exploiters, I don't think they're abusing their power; I don't think they have a lot of power to abuse.

My goal is not to force anyone's hand but to address these issues and my concerns about working conditions in artist-run culture, which is a general problem.

**SC: I think a lot of this discomfort was rooted in our job descriptions and contracts being outdated and not indicative of our actual jobs, let alone reflective of our passion for the work we do. It's interesting that at the 11th hour — once we knew all the contracts and job descriptions that you could access, all the points that formalize the relationship between the institution and the employee — was the moment when you decided to step back and use the list of these documents in place of the documents themselves. The list does many of the same things as the contracts but somehow feels like a less sensitive document.**

JS: Well, the email list you sent is almost irreverent in a way: it's informal and I think it does exactly what it needs to do. It shows that people were willing to engage and contribute to the piece and that I ultimately thought that it was not necessary to reveal that information. Instead we can have a

work that shows people's uncertainty about it. Your email shows many of the problems with the documents, that they're inadequate, that they're out of date, etc. I don't think these things would come up any more by showing the contracts themselves. Those are the things that are missing from the contracts, and they aren't going to be shown any better by displaying those documents.

**SC: Yes, in some ways it's obtusified by them.**

JS: It's hidden in all the extra paperwork and I think that absenting the documents from display better indicates what I really wanted to get at with them. It's less messy, even though it's more emotional. I'm always cutting back at the last minute, removing as much as I can.

**SC: I think there's a weird relationship between emotion and production in your work — there seems to be a divide in your practice between works that involve intensive production to create counterfeit objects and work that is much more concerned with affective labour and dealing with people but yields a far smaller material presence.**

JS: Material presence in my work goes up and down. In this project the configuration of labour, absence and negotiation is enough. It doesn't need any production, the production exists in the negotiations, conversations and tensions — they're the materials and don't need to be made otherwise, they're already being manipulated, worked and put under tension. I'm using these material sculptural processes through our meetings, over Skype and email.

**SC: It leaves a very ephemeral paper trail and maybe that's enough to signal the process. There has been more than six months of negotiation from the first gesture of asking for**

**the contracts to now, where you are beyond needing them, and the conversation in the interim has reframed the whole idea of the contract itself.**

JS: Exactly, the conversation around the exposition of the contracts surprised me and brought up issues that are the same or very related to the issues that are preventing people from demanding better conditions. It's messy, difficult to put your finger on, and hard to talk about because it's so tied up in feelings of personal value and worth. It's tied up in the reasons why we get involved in artist-run culture in the first place.

**SC: Perhaps some of the vulnerability is heightened because as art, it is a symbolic gesture. It's uncomfortable to have these conversations because you, as an artist, are not proposing a change, you're talking about a problem.**

JS: I think that as art (and this is why I do these things as art) it has a public, there's an aspect of exposure going on in all of this work. People are uncomfortable with this because it takes materials and issues out of the mundane and raises them to the symbolic. We've learned to accept and tolerate these issues but are uncomfortable having them put on display and exposed to public judgment. It makes sense to me now that people would get really nervous about this action because they feel that things that are privately acceptable are going to be used to shame them.

**SC: Or that our self-justification for the terms in which we live and work will crumble under public scrutiny.**

JS: I want to use the public and the gallery as a way to transform these things, to give them a symbolic status and to make them useful. It

needs to be art and it can't be something else. The fact that it's art makes them recognizable in a way they wouldn't otherwise be, however, the public is otherwise ancillary to both the gesture and the organization.

#### **Curator's Acknowledgements**

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#### **Sam Cotter**

Sam Cotter is a Toronto-based artist and writer interested in intersections of research, text and image. Cotter regularly employs photography, film and installation to examine issues of visual representation and artifice. Recent exhibitions and projects include Reciprocity – a failure to communicate, a special commission for C Magazine's participation at the L.A. Art Book Fair, Spit and Image at Ryerson Image Centre and An Exhibition (with Fraser McCallum) at Xspace Cultural Centre, he will have a solo exhibition at Zalucky Contemporary in the fall of 2016. His writing has appeared in publications including Canadian Art, CV, C Magazine and Flash Art.

#### **Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge**

Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge have collaborated with various trade unions and community organizations in the production of their staged photographic work over the past 30 years. Their work has been exhibited across Canada and internationally in both the trade union movement and art galleries and museums. They are active in several labour arts initiatives including the Mayworks Festival in Toronto and the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre in Hamilton, Ontario.

#### **Kajsa Dahlberg**

Kajsa Dahlberg is an artist based in Oslo and Berlin. She works with image, text and sound. She received her Master of Fine Arts at the Malmö Art Academy in 2003 and was a studio fellow at the Whitney Independent Study Program 2007/2008. Her work has been shown in biennials and group exhibitions such as: 8 Bienal do Mercosul, Brazil, and Turku Biennial (2011); Manifesta 8 Biennial, Murcia, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, and Lunds Konsthall (2010); Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, The Kitchen, New York, and The Power Plant, Toronto (2009); The 1st Athens Biennial, The Prague Biennial #3, and The Royal College of Art, London (2007).

#### **John Hampton**

John Hampton is a curator and artist of Chickasaw and mixed-European ancestry from Regina, Saskatchewan. He holds a Masters in Curatorial Studies from the University of Toronto. His recent research has focused on the ontologies of stones, complications of settler identification within indigenous identities, humorous minimalism, and the intersection of new materialism and post-internet practices. He is currently the outgoing Artistic Director of Trinity Square Video and Curator in Residence at the Art Museum at University of Toronto, and is the incoming Executive Director at the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba.

#### **Juan Ortiz-Apuy**

Costa Rica-born Montreal-based artist Juan Ortiz-Apuy has a BFA from Concordia University, a Post-graduate Diploma from the Glasgow School of Art, and a MFA from NSCAD University. His work has been exhibited across Canada and internationally. Recent exhibitions include The McLaren Arts Centre, SPOROBOLÉ Contemporary Art Centre, Gallery Birch Libralato, ARTSPACE, Eastern Edge, A Space Gallery and Quebec City Biennial: Manif d'Art 7. He is represented by gallery antoine ertaskiran.

#### **Joshua Schwebel**

Joshua Schwebel is a conceptual artist based in Berlin, working through site and situation-responsive interventions.

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