



Kunsthuis SYB | **archief** / 14 | WHEN SPECTATORS WORK, WORKERS OBSERVE - THE BEGINNING IS THE LAST PART TO BE CREATED

[persbericht](#) | [English](#)  
[weblog](#)  
[recensies](#)

## INTERVIEW WITH MARIANNA LIOSI AND ALESSANDRA SAVIOTTI

door: Vincent van Velsen

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The curators and the artists showed an overview of the research process that they developed during their stay at the residency. Apparent were traces of individual reflections as well as of the collaborative work with the guests and the audience, next to diagrams on the walls, an archive of inspiring texts gave a visual idea of the physical and conceptual works that were carried out during this period. As a result of their stay the artists involved, Cathleen Schuster and Marcel Dickhage have presented "In order to produce", a film installation *in progress*, which was started at SYB. It shows a woman who is filmed while recalling her past, yet her history seems to be one of a place; a house; a former factory. The narrated memories seem slightly different from the images the viewer is discovering in the film – as if the narrator remembers some elements incorrect. The former history of the described space as a candy factory is confronted with the actual storyline of the location as one for art production. At one point, the woman turns herself towards the spectator and leaves the viewer of the work with questions on his/her own position and role. During the final presentation, the film was shown in a situation with a desk, a laptop and headphones that refer to the actual process of editing (making). Furthermore, a sound installation was installed in the back of the exhibition space. This work recalls both the candy workshops led by Elles Kiers engaging the children living in Beetsterzwaag, and the identity of Kunsthuis SYB as a space of actual production. Based on their residency and presentation, Vincent van Velsen asked the curators Marianna Liosi and Alessandra Saviotti some questions.

Vincent van Velsen: *How did you interact with the constraints of a residency; on the one hand being in a relative isolation with the freedom of doing anything you'd like, on the other still having the liability to produce an outcome, in the end; a presentation that in some certain way should reflect your actions during this free-think-time at Kunsthuis SYB - a mode d'emploi you are also questioning in your research?*

Alessandra Saviotti: Personally, I found the rhythm of working at SYB very productive, which means that I was not stressed about the preparations of a specific outcome, but I was in put in a condition to do so because having proper amount of time for thinking outside of the everyday acceleration. This is also why we decided to show some process-based outcomes during the presentation. If we agree that SYB is a place where private process of (artistic) labour are publicly exposed, the space becomes a 'factory' where the focus is on the process of production (which includes different subjects involved), in which the final 'produced commodity' might be assembled elsewhere.

Marianna Liosi: Quoting an artist that I really appreciate 'every obstacle is a trampoline'. From this perspective, during our stay at SYB, isolation had to turn into visibility and liability to produce in concentration. To me both these "constraints" were resources to take advantage of. The focus on the notion of "production" came from the intent to, during the residency, deconstruct what "being productive" means and represents for us as subjects, viewers and members of an economic system, as a means to explore possible alternatives.

WHEN SPECTATORS WORK, WORKERS OBSERVE - THE BEGINNING IS THE LAST PART TO BE CREATED

Marianna Liosi en Alessandra Saviotti i.s.m. Marcel Dickhage en Cathleen Schuster

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AS: Still, we did have to deal with some kind of pressure, which was not to be understood as self-exploitation. I'd like to use Maurizio Lazzarato's words to put on the table another aspect related to authorship, which was another essential part in the research: 'As we have seen, immaterial labour forces used to question the classical definitions of *work* and *workforce*, because it results from a synthesis of different types of knowhow: intellectual skills, manual skills, and entrepreneurial skills. Immaterial labour constitutes itself in immediately collective forms that exist as networks and flows. The subjugation of this form of cooperation and the "use value" of these skills to capitalist logic does not take away the autonomy of the constitution and meaning of immaterial labour. On the contrary, it opens up antagonisms and contradictions that, to use once again a Marxist formula, demand at least a "new form of exposition."

VvV: *During the residency you initiated several film screenings and conversations on these subjects; why did you select these and how did these contribute to the research and its outcomes?*

MS: Film screenings and discussions were crucial to feed the discussions between the four of us, but also we wanted to display some driving questions that we found important to explore during the residency: the capitalist pressure on the production of goods (commodities or knowledge), the traceable similarities between the acts of working and watching, and the role of catalyser that the subjects/observer has in relation to collectivity.

AL: We have been preparing the program for a very long time and this gave us time to choose carefully what would be relevant to discuss and to watch for the four of us, but at the same time we did not have the complete picture in mind yet. We thought that having guests and screenings in support of our different interests could have been an interesting way of framing the conversation. It is curious that all our guests were collective initiatives (Casco, Bodies at Work, Manual Labours); it came naturally but then it also helped us to find a strong *leitmotiv* for our research. We chose our guests thinking about the different layers we wanted to investigate and we summarized it within a diagram we collectively drawn in the space. Just to give an example, with Ying Que from Casco we analysed the potential of an art organization within the local context in which it operates as well as internal equilibrium between 'business' and 'busyness'. We discussed their 'unlearning sessions' that they have been doing in collaboration with Annette Krauss and we replicated some physical exercises in the space in order to grasp the idea around how to 'learn to unlearn' bad habits.

MS: Concerning films, we started with an overview of the methodical but dignified and rewarding everyday life of the shop owners portrayed in their humanity by Agnès Varda in Paris (*Daguerréotype*), along with the solipsism within the mass of the worker-producer and being a victim of his own exploitation (in *Workers leaving the Factory*, Harun Farocki). Also, we watched the story of a group of coal miners in the Ruhr area, whose souvenirs of labour have become oral goods of exchange, sacralised in a museum where workers' experiences are the commodities, not the objects (*Memory Museum*, by Isil Egrikavuk), and we finished by telling about the creative crisis of a film director overwhelmed by the pressure of a love affair, the demanding cinema business, and of his own consciousness as an artist, staged in Federico Fellini in *8 and 1/2*.

VvV: *You also initiated a candy-making workshop for the children of Beetsterzwaag, relating to the history and heritage of the building of Kunsthuis Syb as a candy factory. In 'Museum as a Factory' Hito Steyerl reflects on the politics of space and representation, aside the all-encompassing productive amenability and contingency of cultural production and/or the neo-liberal society as a whole. Outsourcing productive capabilities via a workshop could be fitted in this frame. What are your thoughts on this possible relation?*

AL: The artists (Cathleen Schuster and Marcel Dickhage) proposed the workshop as part of their research towards the collective script, and we welcomed the idea because it was both a strong comment towards production and labour, giving the fact that it was outsourced to children, at the same time it was a nice manner to involve an external audience.

MS: The involvement of children in manual gestures and tasks aimed to realise candies was a way to involve the community in our activities and stress the peculiarity of SYB as a dynamic and active dimension, next to interacting with both the previous and current relation to labour and production of commodities. If you like, it is possible to see at SYB the reiteration of a mechanism of collective generation.

AL: Going further into Hito Steyerl's text, I was personally interested in becoming the literal spectator of our project because of the language barrier. Besides the fact that we 'delegated' the workshop to a candy maker. I was also interested in seeing how this action could literally transform spectators into workers (the children) and temporarily confining them in a space where to stop and produce something. At the same time I have a different position than Marianna when I affirm that I am not interested in considering the simple act of looking as an active action, however I accept this view. At the same time I am fascinated by the idea of 'remunerated usership' - a concept by Stephen Wright. Questioning what happens when the *spectator* is transformed into a *user*, able to generate value — which is not financial retribution, perhaps, but in some negotiated form. Should the user be remunerated for the value that he/she generated? I think the surplus value (in any form) should be redistributed to the community that produced it and I agree when Wright says that when this idea is applied to an art context, the creator and user tend to merge: user-ship spills over into production. And who is in the end generating the surplus? The worker!

VvV: *Looking into Allan Sekula's Gallery Voice Montage (1970): in this work, that you have referred to in the project, spectators unknowingly become performers - active parts of, or contributors to the artwork by means of the artist who installed microphones in two blank canvases in order to collect/record visitors' reactions. However, if one would focus on these conversations, you directly see (or hear) the spectators' expectations and in that sense a form of obligation that artists apparently have to deliver something to the (paying) visitor: ranging from a direct 'experience' to the idea of transferring/providing cultural capital. What are your thoughts on this relation – also relating to your time at SYB that may have included expectations and obligations?*

MS: What you say is totally true. There is a sense of expectation pervading all of us as "user", "viewer" or "consumer". I also think that it is exactly in this form of prospect of future benefit that Sekula plays. Disregarding the expectations is a way to highlight the "responsibility" that each one of us - and not only the artist - has to undertake in the creation of its contents, in its interpretation and its interiorisation of them. At SYB we also had to face expectations – from the board, from the grants. The way we found to respond to those, was to reflect on them critically. It would have been very simplistic and also stupid to refuse to produce any outcome just with the purpose of carrying on a critic to a system – which would be SYB in this case. In this sense, I tried to focus on a generative power. Using a critical position during the production and to take advantage of the given situation.

AL: When we thought to include and re-enact Sekula's work we wanted to use it as a possibility to give an answer to the possible question, why did we choose 'When spectators work, workers observe' as a title. Furthermore, it was interesting to look at the employment of the spectator in order to produce an artwork. Thinking about it now, it reminds me of another project Marianna and I curated before, in collaboration with the Italian artist Riccardo Benassi. The work in concerned, 'Briefly Ballare', is a publication that arose from a museum visitors' book in which visitors made harsh complaints with regard to a work by Benassi called 'What Does a Flat Surface need in order to become a Dancefloor (Us)'. In the book, the artists attempts to analyse the succession of events, his role as cultural operator in contemporary society and – taking advantage of the fact that the work was a sound piece and therefore invisible – calls into question the "visual" quality of aesthetic judgement. The comments in/about Sekula's piece were almost the same: 'this is not art!', 'I could do that' and 'gain money!', etcetera. I think the key is that to define what kind of work is either art or

immaterial/cognitive labour is still an open question.

Everyone feels the freedom to define what art is – and I do not say that this is wrong – while forgetting that powerful institutions like museums, art spaces, academies and also media are crucial for what becomes, or is considered art. In addition economy together with politics plays an important role in establishing what can be labelled as art. Again, art is not a question of consensus but it became what it is considered through recognition, which is often established by and within institutional mechanisms.

*VvV: In the end: the manner of presenting the work enforced the viewer to take the same position in order to watch the presented video, as the maker had when he/she was making the film (behind a laptop with headphones on). In this sense the act of watching could be seen as a performative experience initiated by the curator and undergone by the spectator. Can you elaborate on the considerations and outcomes?*

AL: Going back to our reference text 'Is a museum a factory' and considering the practice of the artists we invited, the aim was to create a sort of cinematic space, which is different from traditional installations. We installed every moment of the genesis of the film, even the audio recorded during the workshop, which is not used for the film instead.

MS: This context that was built by the curator and the artists forces on into a certain physical experience and relation with the space and people in it, so in this sense I agree with your link to performativity. Of course, their role is creating the frame of a window to watch through, but they are not those who decide how far and in which direction the gaze can go. The gesture of watching is the most democratic and self-determined means we have to take part in an artwork and experience the reality around us. Watching is thinking and assuming a role, that is why every spectator is an actor who draft his/her own stories within the space they are situated.

AL: Together with Cathleen Schuster and Marcel Dickage we reflected on how to give back to the audience the research process. In the presentation we did not want to expose a thesis or just a homogenous point of view, because they were manifold. We launched an input - that might be understood or not - towards the completion of the story. Raising questions on what the visitor should to the processed-based installation? Consequently, what shall we retain from this exchange as experience's orchestrators? This is precisely when the visitor decides to remain spectator or become worker.