

THE DEMON OF COMPARISONS

28.03 – 17.05.2009

OPENING:

FRIDAY 27 MARCH
17:00

S E M I N A R :
SATURDAY 4 APRIL
11:00-18:00 AT
LOODS 6

AND IN CONJUNCTION
WITH THE ANTAGONISTIC LINK
AT CASCO

SMBA

The Demon of Comparisons

Please note this newsletter does not include the translation of the original text. The text is written in English and its translation both in Dutch and Indonesian is available on the Electric Palm Tree website (www.electricpalmtree.org).

The Demon of Comparisons
28. 03 - 17. 05. 2009

Heman Chong, Hafiz, Beom Kim, Sung Hwan Kim, Tibor Hajas, Gorzales International (Sabi Yoon & Minja Gu), Wendelien van Oldenborgh, Tadasu Takamine with special contributions by Philippe Rekeawicz and Grace Samboh.

Curated by Kyongfa Che and Binna Choi in collaboration with Cosmin Costinas

Opening: Friday 27 March, 17:00.
The opening event is accompanied by *Finders Keepers*, a lecture by artist Jeuno Kim

Seminar: Saturday 4 April, 11:00-18:00
at Loods 6, With Michèle Faguet, Patrick D. Flores, Vit Havránek, Hiroshi Yoshioka, Ahmad bin Mashadi, David Riff

Curated by Cosmin Costinas in collaboration with Kyongfa Che and Binna Choi

The project The Antagonistic Link, curated by Binna Choi, will run at Casco throughout the same period, in dialogue with *The Demon of Comparisons*.



Interview between an electric palm tree & Electric Palm Tree

electric palm tree (e): First of all, I am happy to have this occasion to speak to you, the one who has adopted our name for your platform. So tell me first about this curious choice.

Electric Palm Tree (E): For us, you have always been a distant presence on the streets, with your solitary and distorted state of exoticism and otherness. Unlike a “natural” palm tree, originally a symbol of victory and peace, and later on a metaphor for the tropical and the exotic, we thought that artificial palm trees like you would help us uproot such myths embedded in the natural palm tree, and reflect on notions of “tropical” and “exotic” as distorted states of otherness. Perhaps, as a unit, we could label ourselves as a “center for post-colonial study and art” or as we called it “a circuit for art and alterity”. But we wanted to have a name that keeps us at a moderate distance from discourse and instead presents a confrontational image that might request an associative faculty. This name association, we hope, invokes curiosity and communicates our activities and aims, which are not yet fully verbalized. It is partially our reaction to post-colonial discourse that speaks for and about the unspoken or the oppressed but simultaneously contradicts itself by reinforcing and imposing identities through the power of discourse.

e: What do you mean by reinforcing and imposing identities? With power?

E: We quote Vít Havránek, who shared this expression “no identity is constructed by decision” with us. It is indeed so. The argument in post-colonialism and identity politics (race, gender, sexuality, class) shouldn’t be abandoned entirely, but we should not neglect its certain limitations either. For example, identity politics often neglects the situated nature of power dynamics and subjugates human subjects to its own discourse, which comes to act as another form of power. We should be cautious of the word “identity” since its notion restricts sharing space and contradicts subjectivities or ideologies by fixing certain positionalities, repre

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sentations and politics. Meanwhile, the notions of “equity”, “acceptance”, or “tolerance” within the discourse are too easily subsumed by leftist politics, and imply rather an antagonistic relationship between a subject and the “other”, not to mention the one in power and the subordinate, which easily wither in confrontation with the threat of security and survival.

e: Tell me, how do you deal with this limitation?

E: We want to make more philosophical inquiries into the notion of subjectivity, if not identity, to talk about ourselves vis-à-vis large social and political frameworks and question how such subjectivity negotiates with the otherness that is produced in the comparative view that is inherently embedded in the logic of power game. For example, we both live in “Asia” and “Europe”, like many people do now, and we embrace, or are torn between, contradictory values, history, language, and knowledge. Above all, although it may sound paradoxical, we need to be ready to deconstruct this dichotomy; even while it is rooted in separate “cultural identities”.

e: The method of your inquiry still seems to be unanswered.

E: Well, the fundamental desire for setting up Electric Palm Tree was in self-institutionalizing a curatorial structure—which could be eccentric in its method and manifestation—for transnational and collective artistic research, particularly traversing several regions. It is different from the so-called cultural exchange in which people often exchange already (de)valued cultural artifacts. To give you a specific example, in September of last year we organized a week-long workshop, presentations, and discussions titled *Open Circuit #1: Yogyakarta* rolling at a now “open circuit” of different art and cultural institutions in Yogyakarta (Kedai Kabun, Kuncu, Indonesian Visual Art Archive, Cemeti Art House, Jogja National Museum) in Indonesia. The workshop was intended

to feed each other with ideas and learn from each other by comparatively looking at different discourses of socio-political transformations in the world in the last decades. In order to set up a platform for everyone coming from different backgrounds and to create a dialogue, we took the method of using an image presented by every participant as point of departure. In the evenings, we co-organized *Nocturnal Ngabuburit*, meaning “evening picnic” in the Indonesian language. The evenings included screenings of artworks, artists’ talks, long discussions, and small parties with local artists, students, and cultural producers.

e:But doesn't “cultural baggage” inherently assign meaning to cultural artifacts? If so, can we ever have autonomous “cultural” exchange? What do you think the discussions and interactions trigger? What does it do in the long term? How do you define your success or failure?

E: Oh, this is not to say that we can get away from cultural baggage. On the contrary! But let's look at a more micro-copic area in which such baggage is inherent. That's why not only the discussion itself but the whole situation of the workshop and the events that were intended to generate questions and reflect the issues we set. That is, besides comparisons between the intellectual experiences and artistic vocabularies of individuals in their perceived social and political transformative contexts, we closely observed very subtle personal transitions in this particular closed and private group situation. Questions such as, “How and what am I doing here?”, “How do I (inter)act, and how am I perceived?”, “Can we share the private dialogues of such exclusive meetings with the public?”, “What does the majority of the group, who was totally unfamiliar and felt irresistibly exotic, feel about the shared environment, and how do they interact with everyone else from that very environment?”, and “How can this unique shared time be extended?”, were raised and touched upon. Openness, generosity, a sense of community (constructed in the very setting of one week of group and public meetings), the underlying tension caused by difference, various degrees and modes of communication experienced at every moment under a certain artificial



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lity were strong and vivid. We don't think these responses can be judged by a scheme of success and failure as long as it continues into Open Circuit #2, #3, #4...or something else. The fact that we formed new modes of communication belonging to a specific time and place is a unique definitive. This will be specified and differentiated every time. The format of communication or the support structure for discussion feels crucial, even though it will be counter-balanced by informal and intimate dialogues happening backstage.

e: So, what follows now?

E: With the aim of extending our experience and discussion during *Open Circuit #1*, we are currently working on an exhibition to be held at SMBA. The title is *The Demon of Comparisons*, which is a retranslation of a phrase from Jose Rizal's novel *Noli Me Tangere*, "el demonio de las comparaciones", used by Benedict Anderson as the title of his book, under the rendering *The Specter of Comparisons*. An original and refined thinker, Benedict Anderson questioned the patterns and the meeting points that are to be found throughout geographies, times, and power structures, that lead to formations of identities and various senses of belonging. With our word choice, we acknowledge his remarkable contribution but wish to add the potential of the polisemy, indeed the specters, of the original Spanish word, "demonio", in Rizal's text, to our project. It goes without saying that comparisons and contrasts are inevitable, and are basic processes toward giving accounts of cultural encounters, and assessing them according to one's episteme, values, and beliefs. Myriad forces are at play in the process of various inclinations and tensions, leading back to the constitution or transformation of one's subjectivity. Here, the "demon of comparison" signifies the equivocal force that shakes and challenges the paradigm of the episteme, which has the potential to produce a certain type of transnational collectivity.

e: OK. Comparison here seems to be a meaningful notion to reflect on one's subjectivity, but not as something to decide power relations and differences. By the way, speaking of comparison, how do you as a curatorial unit compare and understand your initiative with other projects and initiatives of similar interest?

E: Well, from our observation and experience of having been involved in projects in the realm of cultural exchange, they tend to focus on encountering and acquiring knowledge about the other culture, other social and political situations, but without going beyond the scheme of received discourses or with the naïve mission of creating "friendship". For us, such a mode of "exchange" has the risk of replacing "attitude" with "latitude", for it dismisses liminal space for negotiation and its potentiality, whereby our "demonic" subjectivities operate and intersect in the complex and heterogeneous sphere of culture and society created by globalization and mobility.

e: With such awareness and with the collaborations you have created so far, how are you formulating the exhibition? Is there anything else you are organizing?

E: We invited some of the artists who joined the *Open Circuit #1* to produce new works or contribute with their works, and also asked the coordinator Grace Samboh, whom we closely collaborated with, to make her curatorial intervention. We are also continuing our collaboration with Philippe Rekacewicz, cartographer and geographer. With him, this last May, we officially launched our platform with a cartographic workshop of (subjective) world mapping guided by him as well as with a lecture by him. For the exhibition he created a new series of world map sketches that show the transition of world cultural and political hegemonic power dynamics since 1600 up to now. We consider them a prelude for our exhibition. On top of that, there are two insertions of works by Beom Kim and Tibor Hajasi which we feel are significant to the conceptual framework.

We'd like to emphasize that the exhibition is accompanied by a public seminar with which we want to extend the dynamics and affection of comparisons into a "discursive" area, and the lecture by the artist Jeuno Kim, *Finders Keepers*, which explores the notion of intersectionality as a strategy for the analysis of discourse and power and artistic articulation. And one of us, Binna, is also hooking the exhibition up

The Demon of Comparisments / The Antagonistic Link

to another project entitled *The Antagonistic Link* at Casco, which is obliquely in dialogue with each other.

Electric Palm Tree was initiated by Kyongfa Che and Binna Choi, joined by Cosmin Costinas, and established in the beginning of 2008. Its activities will continue with many other colleagues, friends, and as-yet-strangers. More information about Electric Palm Tree is available at www.electricpalmtree.org.

The blinking, blinking palm tree stands still.



The Antagonistic Link
29 March –17 May 2009

Project by Electric Palm Tree at Casco, Office for Art, Design and Theory in conjunction with *The Demon of Comparisons* at SMBA

Opening: Saturday 28 March, 17.00, accompanied by a writing and performance series conducted by Sönke Hallmann & Achim Lengerer.

An experimental setting for drawing transnational links with *Mixterminal* by Mixrice, *Heavy Metal (News) Around the World* by Sasa [44] with Sulki & Min, *Bye Bye Kipling* by Nam June Paik and *Operational Play* by Hwa-Yeon Nam. Accompanied by *Ongoing propositions under different conditions* by Sönke Hallmann & Achim Lengerer.

'The Antagonistic Link' is an experimental setting for drawing transnational links in the form of an agonistic process that assumes the opposing parties to be in a state of conflicting coexistence. 'The Antagonistic Link' uses *Bye Bye Kipling*, a historical satellite event conceived by Nam June Paik in 1986, as a point of departure; the exhibition combines this piece with three other projects initiated by artists and designers from South Korea, as well as a number of related activities. All these projects and activities explore the constructive possibilities of overcoming the sense of distance and antagonism that is the paradoxical product of advancing globalization.

"East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet", the first line of The Ballad of East and West, a poem by Rudyard Kipling, opens up Paik's live satellite link-up of Japan, Korea and the United States – a broadcast featuring

Seminar: The Demon of Comparisons
Saturday 4 April 2009, 11:00-18:00
Venue: Loods 6 (KNSM laan 143, Amsterdam)

Michèle Faguet, Patrick D. Flores, Vit Havránek, Yoshioka Hiroshi, Ahmad bin Mashadi, David Riff

The seminar is conceived of as an intimate space for shared reflection between a number of writers, researchers, philosophers, and curators who have been committed in their practice to questioning underlying processes of history writing in a shifting cannon and a changing geography of artistic practice. Working on narratives and practices that lie on the borders of a (Western) canonic representation of art and its political dimensions, often at the fault line between forms of modernism, avant-garde urgencies, and the articulations of the political in the different cultural landscapes they are interested in, the speakers share an interest in the critical tools to be employed in their endeavors. Focusing on spaces with histories as different as Latin America, Eastern Europe, and South East Asia, the seminar will explore the ambivalence of comparative approaches, with all their strategic promises and critical traps.

Language: English. Entrance fee: 7 euros
For further information, please email Kerstin Winking, assistant curator of SMBA (kerstin@smba.nl).
Reservations are requested; please send an email to mail@smba.nl by 2 April 2009.

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different sorts of cultural events and performances.

Although Paik designed and coordinated the event with the intention of countering this poetic declaration, the video (a shorter edit of the original broadcast) reveals various ironic and fractious moments in such linkage. This may be a starting point for questioning the complexities and contradictions inherent in today's communication channels and global links — an inquiry that neither denies nor blithely celebrates the possibilities of transnational connection.

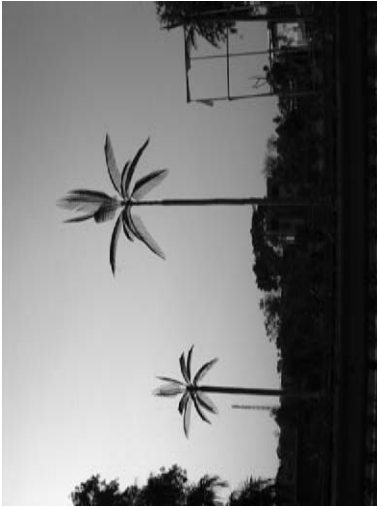
The title is adopted from the book *The Antagonistic Link*, which deals with the short-lived collaborative relationship between artists Theo van Doesburg and Joaquin Torres-Garcia in the late 1920's.

The project is co-organized by Binna Choi, director of Casco and co-curator of Electric Palm Tree, with the Casco team of Mirjam van Drenth, Yolande van der Heide, Magali Meijers and Jakob van Stolk, in collaboration with SMBA.

Recruitment for Operational Play

We are recruiting participants for the *Operational Play*, a participatory performance coordinated at six different locations across the city of *Operational Play* by Hwa Yeon Nam on Saturday 16 May. Please check our website or contact us (Jakob van Stolk.jakob@cascoprojects.org) to find out more and/or participate in the performance.

For further information and agenda of related activities, please visit the website (www.cascoprojects.org) or contact Magali Meijers at Casco (magall@cascoprojects.org).



Casco
Office for Art, Design, and Theory
Nieuwekade 213-215
3511RW Utrecht
The Netherlands
www.cascoprojects.org

Stedelijk Museum Bureau
Amsterdam
Rozenstraat 59, 1016 NN Amsterdam
t +31 (0)20 4220471
f +31 (0)20 6261730
www.smba.nl/mail@smba.nl
Open Tuesday – Sunday,
11:00 - 17:00
Sign-up for the SMBA email
newsletter at www.smba.nl

Next Exhibition:
Nathaniel Mellors
30 May-12 July 2009
Opening: Friday 29 May,
17:00—19:00

Colophon

Co-ordination: Jelle Bouwhuis,
Binna Choi, Kerstin Winking
Editing: Yolande van der Heide,
Nicole Pollentier
Design: Mevis & Van Deursen
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SMBA: Jelle Bouwhuis (curator), Jan
Meijer (office manager),
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Rozenstraat 59 / NL-1016 NN Amsterdam
www.smba.nl

AT CASCO IN CONJUNCTION WITH
THE DEMON OF COMPARISONS
AT SMBA

A PROJECT BY ELECTRIC PALM TREE

THE ANTAGONISTIC LINK

29.03 - 17.05.2009

OPENING:
SATURDAY 28 MARCH 17:00

A PROJECT BY

ELECTRIC PALM TREE