

Emelie Chhangur

Social Intervention and Pedagogical Practice as a Way of Curating

I am going to depart from the ideas of Ricardo Basbaum as I take you on a trip through the contemporary art landscape of Rio de Janeiro, highlighting what I believe to be spaces engaged in innovative curatorial and educational practices that take their cue from the principles and strategies of contemporary artists. While most of my discussion today will centre on the work done in Brazil, I will make an attempt to follow these principles of collaboration, exchange, innovation, and transformation myself during this seminar by connecting the work done in Rio de Janeiro to that done here at the Art Gallery of York University, and Toronto. I want to suggest that Brazilian art production, the spaces that support it locally, and the role that these spaces (and individuals) play in the international art world, can be a new model for transforming the very nature—operations, functions, and relationship to a public—of a contemporary university-affiliated public art gallery. After discussing the work in Rio de Janeiro, I am going to conclude by showing you some of the recent curatorial and educational projects at AGYU, briefly touching upon upcoming programmes that include contemporary Brazilian artists. I hope this reflects back on some of the artistic, curatorial, and educational strategies I present in the first part of the seminar. *[slide]*

Warning: be aware of this vocabulary distinction:

- 1 when a curator is a full-time-curator we call her/him a “curator-curator”; when the curator questions the nature and function of her/his role we should write “etc-curator” (so we can imagine several categories: writer-curator, director-curator, artist-curator, producer-curator, agent-curator, engineer-curator, doctor-curator, etc.)
- 2 when an artist is a full-time-artist we call her/him an “artist-artist”; when the artist questions the nature and function of her/his role we should write “etc-artist” (so we can imagine several categories: curator-artist, writer-artist, activist-artist, producer-artist, agent-artist, theoretician-artist, therapist-art-

ist, teacher-artist, etc.)—Ricardo Basbaum, *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated By An Artist*.

In a response to Jens Hoffmann’s proposal that the next Documenta should be curated by an artist, Rio de Janeiro artist Ricardo Basbaum, in an essay included in the catalogue *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated by an Artist*, described a distinction between what he categorized as full-time artists—called an artist-artist, and full-time curators—called a curator-curator—and those that question the very nature and function of her/his role, referred to as etc-artists or etc-curators.

In his response, Basbaum questions the role and function of this major Western world art fair, while naming a new vocabulary from which to discuss these operations so that he may get to the heart of the matter (language.) Basbaum’s new terms reflect his desire to re-evaluate the role and function of the artist or curator’s practice in light of its potential social, political, or pedagogical context. He is also, obviously, interested in enriching and diversifying the language we use when we talk about “artists” and the work that they do.

Audience member Could you just tell us what Documenta is?

Emelie Chhangur Yeah, it’s a large contemporary art event that happens in Kassel every five years.

Philip Monk Germany. Kassel, Germany.

I bring up Documenta and Basbaum’s response to Hoffmann’s proposal because I’m trying to set the stage for a discussion about the influence that a number of Brazilian artists and curators have used their in practices to transform the nature of how things are done in the art world. One instance where we can see this happening is in Brazil’s recent inclusion in commercial art fairs and these large-scale Western showcases of contemporary art. They participate on their own terms and their actions are transformative on many levels, including the way in which their work functions to comment upon or intervene into the commercial art fairs’ methods of operation, from their purpose right through to their effect on a public.

Basbaum states that the etc-artist or etc-curator often brings to the forefront—and

I'm quoting him—"connections between art and life, art and communities, opening a pathway for the curious, a rich mix of casual and singular circumstances, cultural and social differences and thought. An etc-artist or etc-curator might have an art practice that sets up a relationship between the artist and audience, us and them, me and you, through gains and processes that evolve as experiences over time, to witness the procedures of transformation."

I've started here because I'd like us to think in Basbaum's terms and follow the principles and strategies of contemporary Brazilian art production at the level of the etc-artist and the etc-curator (the etc-curator being exemplified here by A Gentil Carioca). I'm going to coin some more terms, inspired by Basbaum and the work that we do at the AGYU: the "etc-educator" and the "etc-institution." If we think in these terms, we can carve out a new territory for our curatorial, educational, and institutional actions by transforming the very nature of our investigations as makers and presenters of contemporary art, thereby transforming its impact both internationally, in an art context, and locally, in the social and political sphere.

The Etc-Curator

A Gentil Carioca is an art space located in the historic centre of downtown Rio de Janeiro. The region is called *S-a-a-r-a*, a place known for being the largest outdoor market in Latin America, founded last century by Arab and Jewish descendants and immigrants.

Opened on September 6, 2003 and directed by artists Ernesto Neto, Laura Lima, and Márcio Botner, A Gentil Carioca was conceived already in a melting pot, with a view of capturing and disseminating artistic diversity in Brazil and the world. Embedded in the mandate of the gallery, and practiced by the artists who run it, is a belief that each work of art is a cultural particle with the potency to illuminate culture and education. In the same way, their artistic strategies propose a history that can be thought about, forged, documented, and changed. A Gentil Carioca is a place where artistic or political contexts can be revitalized. This physical approach supersedes the specialization and elitism of art, or one singular voice, appealing to different kinds of artists, audiences, and thought processes. Their programming,

as well as the relationship to their context, sets up a space in which the etc-artist can work, and the etc-curator could develop a parallel practice.

I'm going to show you a series of slides that document past projects at A Gentil Carioca. I like to call these "interventions into a gentle space" because of my first experience there. When I first visited A Gentil Carioca I had a meeting with Márcio Botner that began around four o'clock in the afternoon and continued past dark, around eight o'clock that night. Through that process, we're hanging out, people from the community were coming in, we're drinking beer, we're talking about art, we're talking about their current exhibition, and discussing points of similarity between AGYU and A Gentil Carioca.

They have a mini-office set up inside the exhibition space, which says something about the way in which they operate (they have offices located just below the exhibition space, where they also house a small collection of works by the gallery artists) and how accessible they are to the public. The "administration" is not removed from the space. They are inside the exhibition, inhabiting it, always there to greet people. This created a situation where we could actually have a discussion about art, showing each other our websites and other projects.

[slide of the exterior street sign]

This is a street sign just in front of A Gentil Carioca that shows you the context in which the gallery operates (i.e., its placement within the neighbourhood.) This is a bar located across the street from the actual gallery space. A Gentil Carioca plays on their relationship to this location by programming events at the bar, entitled *A Gentil no Bar*. They do a lot of programming outside the physical gallery space, out on the streets, which I will get to later in the seminar. This image is taken inside the gallery and the musicians pictured, along with the people hanging out in the space, are a part of an artist's project at A Gentil Carioca, but they are the same people that are regulars at the bar across the street (seen in the last slide.) I'm trying to show that through their programming there really isn't a barrier between the interior of the exhibition space and the exterior context that they inhabit.

A Gentil Carioca also works with poets, writers, and artists of all disciplines to

create projects that reinforce this idea of exchange. A lot of the projects—they're a commercial gallery who represent a number of amazing Brazilian artists—provide a framework for their gallery artists to develop new work specific to the mandates of the gallery so their projects also take on a “gentil” quality. The titles of the exhibitions, as a consequence, are called things like “a gentle week”, or “a gentle day”, and they activate the space through events and activities that draw people in from the local neighborhood.

[installation slide from Lucas exhibition]

This installation is by well-known Brazilian artist Renata Lucas. She actually broke through the interior wall of the gallery to access the neighbouring store—literally breaking down the walls and barriers between the public that's outside, the local community, and the neighbouring stores in the building. And I think that—

Audience member I'm sorry. They broke the wall?

Yes, where the people are standing in this slide is the exhibition space itself. What we see in the puncture through the wall is the interior space of the neighbouring store. The gallery negotiated with their “neighbours” to allow them to break through the wall that separates their respective spaces. In a sense they become one. All of a sudden the space is no longer just this white box. Rio de Janeiro is a gated city. Here, the gallery is moving people laterally, above the ground, through to other places in the building! They're not only committed to people in the neighbourhood but also about welcoming other businesses, other “inhabitants” of this particular area of Rio de Janeiro. They are being brought together through contemporary artistic strategies and interventions made there by artists who exhibit at A Gentil Carioca.

On my first trip to A Gentil Carioca, as I've mentioned, I spent the whole day there, drinking beer, hanging out, talking about art, and at some point Ricardo Basbaum, one of A Gentil Carioca's key artists arrives, in a panic: he has been invited by A Gentil Carioca to do a piece for Basel Miami and he's just had an idea.

Audience member Sorry, what's Basel Miami?

An art fair. A really large commercial art fair that is a highlight of all international art production, and where all collectors and dealers will go to look for work. It's highly commercial. It's like a shopping fair. People go, spend five seconds at each booth, sifting through, that sort of thing. And I'll talk a little bit about his project which—

Philip Monk Forty million dollars art sold.

Audience member How much?

Philip Monk Forty million, maybe, in two days.

So you can imagine the discrepancy between what I have just shown you of A Gentil Carioca, which is a commercial gallery that participates in this art fair, and the kind of work that they do in their local neighbourhood, site-specifically, and how incommensurable it might seem to participate in an art fair. But I will get to that too.

Anyway, so, Ricardo Basbaum comes in, and of course the day has completely gone off track, because I'm there, and now we're all drinking. At dusk we decide to drive to another opening at 9 Novembro, a commercial gallery in the shopping mall downtown. Basbaum takes this opportunity to have his meeting with Márcio Botner, who is driving the car. So here I am, in real time, in the back of a car, witnessing the idea-generating and planning for the big art fair that they will participate in.

[slide of Basbaum's Basel Miami project]

I call this a “gentil intervention into a not so gentil art market”. Basbaum was invited by A Gentil Carioca to be the artist commissioned to make a work for the container project, an off-site component of the art fair. The project was entitled *Re-projecting*, and Basbaum invited nine other artists from A Gentil Carioca to collaborate with him to develop a large diagram—and unfortunately it's a really horrible JPEG—but I wanted to give you a sense of Ricardo's drawings and how he connects things with these wall drawings, both theoretically and through diagrammatic form. He's connecting all of these artists' work to a central practice by asking

just two questions of each artist: write on a piece of paper the names of two artists who are referential to you, and summarize your working method in five words.

His action, for me, also suggests that he is making a comment on how an art fair comes together. His work, therefore, is manifesting a critique of this context in which his work is exhibited. The resulting diagram (the result of this research) was charted out directly on the interior surface of the container, creating a collaborative noncommercial, nonsellable artwork in the space. Basbaum takes this opportunity to teach and link (and develop) a history of—well, a current history of Brazilian art production that is happening in Rio right now, so he’s actually creating a diagram for a public, to teach them about the practices of the artists at A Gentil Carioca (this was also a strategy of Helio Oiticica in the 1970s.) However, by creating a collaborative, noncommercial work for the fair, he emphasizes the process of construction rather than the rarefied object itself, and it meant that the work was also questioning the relationships between the artists and contemporary art market, critiquing the very same system that enabled its production.

He commissioned Bojana Pusker, a curator and writer based in Slovenia, to write a text for his work. Printed on a take-away piece of paper, she writes, “He [Basbaum] has created a space of negotiation at Miami Beach, a space of dissent, making visible that which is not, imposing new patterns of connections between subjects and their external surrounding, and in this way disrupting the processes of various economic/political/cultural operations intrinsic to the institutional logic.”

In Basbaum’s own words, “The connection ‘local-global’ is the productive combination as it articulates two different and complementary fields that can produce effects on each other.”

I would say this is a pedagogical project by an etc-artist.

So now I am going to show some more slides, this time concentrating on A Gentil Carioca’s off-site projects.

This is a piece of a work by Márcio Botner with Pedro, located outside of A Gentil Carioca. The work is not only a work inside a car, but it is also a car that was cre-

ated as a residency for other artists to work in and with—literally driving the car or changing the way the car looks. This particular car had a big tuba coming out of the top so they could play music. The car is shown here parked along the exterior wall of A Gentil Carioca, where many cars often park. It therefore fits in but stands out.

This slide documents the work *suddenly there's books*, which is a stack of books in the form of a column located in the middle of the street. A tower of books that people could just take away that were about art, and human rights, and topics of local interest to the people. It became a device to disseminate information and dismantle the elitism of “knowledge production”.

Audience member So people could take away the books?

Emelie Chhangur People could take them, yeah. So eventually this column just disappeared.

Audience member How do you get them down?

Emelie Chhangur I guess you knock them down. *[laughter]* It's like... what's that game?

Audience member Jenga.

[Showing images of other installations] In my opinion, this kind of work is not performance art. It's not a public intervention. For me, this is performative programming in public, whereby the institution, which works along side the artist, is similarly performing. And it happens in real time on the street, so that, like Basbaum mentions, we can actually see and witness a transformation take place, where people can become a part of this art community that A Gentil Carioca is defining for itself. This is not an existing art community for people to come into or be excluded from, but literally to create an art community from the communities that are already in existence, or newly forming. Artists and nonartists in one place, making work along side each other.

The project located on the exterior wall of A Gentil Carioca is called *Parede*

Gentil. Anyone can see it twenty-four hours a day. What's really interesting about this project, other than being a public work, is that a new artist is commissioned every four and through a donation by a local patron who they find specifically for each project. So, all of a sudden, through their programming in public space, they're starting to also transform the nature of patronage in a place like Brazil, where a collector might want a work because they want to have it in their home, and they want its value (in the art-market sense of value.) A *Gentil Carioca*, I think, is proposing that the value of art can happen in the streets, therefore the value of art can be pedagogical and function as a social project. Their actions are making these patrons rethink the value and effect of contemporary art in this neighbourhood. They acknowledge the role of collecting as a key element in the production of an art history and art criticism, while simultaneously educating the collectors and patrons.

[slide of one of the Parede Gentil projects]

This project was particularly popular. When I was speaking with Márcio at A *Gentil Carioca*, he took me through the various stages of this project and described how the meaning of the work really developed over time. He told me, "We had no idea what would happen, and who knew that this would become a place that people slept and a place that people turned into their homes on the streets?" For four months the wall became this other situation, and eventually people would come into the gallery and say things like, "What is this place [that built this structure on the outside of the building]?" A *Gentil Carioca* created an opportunity to provide a space that not only functions as a little apartment complex on the side of the building, but also invites people in and... you know, if you think about "behaviour" in an art gallery, this proposes a new form of viewer behaviour, even the behaviour of the discrete art object—here's the little car in the corner, too, which is always parked there—you know, they are commissioning works that have truly different participatory functions, real-life functions.

Audience member Sorry, what is that actually made of?

Emelie Chhangur I think it's, basically, a scaffolding.

Audience member It's metal?

Emelie Chhangur Yeah, metal with wood platforms.

Audience member It's like an eight-decker bunk bed.

Emelie Chhangur Exactly.

Audience member Yeah, that's what it looks like. I'm trying to figure out how possibly comfortable it could be.

Emelie Chhangur And eventually people move stuff into it, set stuff up, and hang out there for an indefinite amount of time. Never are you kicked off A Gentil Carioca's installation. It's there for the people.

Audience member Were they surprised? The appropriation of that space...

Emelie Chhangur I think they were. I think they were surprised by how quickly and how comfortable everyone felt with it. *[laughter]*

When no one's there, it looks like, well, it looks like scaffolding going up a wall, which also signifies a space in transformation (i.e., under construction or renovation.) A lot of their works index "the transformative", but it's not the artist or the gallery that transforms these things (though they set it in motion), it's the people in the neighbourhood that come and activate the work however they see fit, and however they interpret it. A Gentil Carioca is a gallery that makes "proposals" to the public (like they do with artists), showing that they're truly invested in engaging that community based on a dialogue and based on a level of exchange that is non-hierarchical.

[slide of quote by Ernesto Neto]

"...For the past few years education does not appear to be a problem in Brazil. Nevertheless, it is a fundamental concern for every human being, especially in Brazil. If we want to change anything in Brazil, whether the economy, the lack of social justice, violence, or even corruption, this can only be done through education. But the

word appears to have disappeared from the political vocabulary.”—Ernesto Neto, artist, founder, A Gentil Carioca.

This is a series of T-shirts by artists from Brazil for a themed exhibition about education. The proposal to the artists was fairly open—just to create a T-shirt that articulates in some way what their opinion of education was in Brazil, and what, perhaps, the role of art could be in education. These essentially become T-shirts that advertised education, put on display at the gallery. When you walk into the gallery now [*slide of T-shirts hanging at entrance to A Gentil Carioca*], you immediately see these T-shirts—T-shirts that are artworks that you could wear. Really, it was the intersection of art and education that was the theme of this particular exhibition.

This goes back to the quote I showed by Ernesto Neto: this exhibition created an opportunity, a setting up of conditions for discussion, an open, public discussion about the role of art and education in their local community, and although a lot of the time the political messages are quasi disguised in these T-shirts, because artists have made them as interventions into the political situation, they ask us also, are they artworks? Really they’re political messages, and their disguises function as means of affecting change within the system (or political situation). Again, going back to it not being this collectible art object, but a system of thought or a process that can circulate through a community. Anyone can have these T-shirts, and anyone can be promoting these T-shirts... and therefore education in Brazil.

When the T-shirt event/exhibition took place, a lot of people in this neighbourhood brought forth their strong opinions about education. They wanted to talk about it. So A Gentil Carioca once again provided a space that was free and open for this taboo discussion to take place—through dialogue with a community. I view A Gentil Carioca’s programming as a form of social research and the institution functions as their medium. It is both the material and the place for their art practice as artists/directors. So they’re artists who have as their tools an exhibition strategy that takes place in a community. Their artworks serve as the interface between the two. Indeed, these T-shirts become a form of marketing for educational reform.

Audience member What does it say down at the bottom? Sorry... I'll just... hang on. Oh... oh dear. Here we go... *[reading text in Portuguese]*
Cool.

Philip Monk What does it say?

Audience member Things that man invented are in need of reinventing.

The Etc-Educator

I'm going to move on here to what I am calling the etc-educator and talk about another space in Rio de Janeiro called Casa Daros. The Daros-Latinamerica Collection is one of the largest collections of Latin American art outside of Latin America. The collection's housed in Zurich. However, they are currently in the process of opening a nonprofit space in Rio de Janeiro that will operate as the base for their Latin American activities. The Director of Art Education and Research is Eugenio Valdés Figueroa. He's Cuban. I brought an issue of *Parachute*, which is a Canadian art magazine that is no longer being published. This is their last issue and it is pretty much dedicated entirely to Eugenio's ideas about art and education. I am going to pass this around so you can get a sense of Eugenio's practice. I would say a new tradition is being made in Rio through Casa Daros' commitment to the intersection of art and education.

[slide of quote from Casa Daros website] "After more than a century of existence, the building now enters a new phase, dedicated to culture, though still receiving students and teachers—as well as viewers, artists, specialists, the merely curious, and anyone else who wishes to make contact with Latin American art and with the history of Rio de Janeiro. The building will be totally restored and, today, it is called Casa Daros."

The original neoclassical-style building, designed in 1749 by the architect Francisco Joaquim Bethencourt da Silva, housed an orphanage for young girls (Recolhimento das Órfãs). Owned and operated by Rio de Janeiro's Santa Casa da Misericórdia [Holy House of Mercy], the city's oldest organization for philanthropy and the building/running of hospitals, the place eventually functioned as a hospital, a

cemetery, the Casa dos Expostos [Homeless Shelter] for children and, at one time, as a church. As the concept of charity developed in Rio de Janeiro, the building was renamed Saint Teresa Education Center and the individuals who stayed at the centre called “students”.

The building’s educational role continued through the last decades of the twentieth century and right up to 2005, when it housed the Anglo-American High School. Casa Daros is a multifunctioning, multifaceted project that will produce exhibitions, publications, residencies, and event-based programming, and be equipped with workshops and classrooms to teach courses in theory and human rights.

[slide of quote from Eugenio Valdés Figueroa] “While institutional power continues to “measure” art and knowledge and to restrict and discipline them, a large part of art defies this power by interacting with alternative forms of pedagogy which provide the heightened levels of diversity the senses and intellect require.”
—Eugenio Valdés Figueroa, *Parachute* #125

I’ve just given you a very brief history of Casa Daros to set up a context for how they look at the past and move forward toward the future. At the core, they are committed to understanding the historical function of this building, how it served the people throughout history, whether its connection was to Portugal at a time—whatever its role was, they’re very aware of that and they incorporate it into their current vision. They’re conscious of the layers of history, and they want to bring something new to this history. Now contemporary art comes to the school and they are trying to build on this new history.

[slide of quote by Eugenio Valdés Figueroa] “For many people, Paulo Freire’s work was a font of inspiration for getting beyond the strictures of the academy and choosing a horizontal approach conducive to breaking with the conventional and the power relations wielded and preserved in institutionalized education.”
— Eugenio Valdés Figueroa, *Parachute*, #125

When I was visiting Casa Daros last November, Mexican artist Betsabeé Romero was the artist-in-residence, invited to produce (because of the renovations on-site) an off-site project in one of the *favelas* that surround Rio de Janeiro. Betsabeé

was doing this residency and workshopping ideas about art and education with youth and young artists. She was also working with recent graduates or high school students, and together they were creating works with the communities in the *favelas*.

She describes the projects as, and I'm quoting her, "a way to recollect culture, to remember and draw attention to a community in order to create other forms of art. The purpose of the project—part workshops, talks, and street actions—was to have the students connect art and education in a nonconventional way."

A primary concern for both Casa Daros and A Gentil Carioca is to dismantle the idea of art-in-isolation or art's elitism so that art can live side-by-side with social programmes, political infrastructures, and other general communities found in their lived locale. Casa Daros is trying to create real communities, because, to go back to Eugenio's quote of Paulo Freire, "To teach is to listen."

Since Casa Daros is not yet up and running in full capacity, there are many different forms of research they're doing concurrently with their renovations. "Welcome to my house" is a theme that they have developed to attract new people, and make welcome as many people as possible into the house. In fact, they say that they aspire to be adopted by the people of Rio de Janeiro so that they can become an integral part of the city, not to impose any kind of other structure—an art scene, an art system, or a system of belief—onto Rio de Janeiro, but to take the already-existing ideas and incorporate them into this multifaceted project. As part of this theme, Casa Daros holds parties for more established local artists, who invite whoever they want to Casa Daros. The parties are called "Come over to my house." These artists, who are more connected to the international art scene, invite collectors, critics, curators, gallery directors, etc. into the house at the same time as youth and workshop leaders, so there's all these things going on simultaneously, and all these people are inhabiting these spaces at the same time, creating another kind of dynamic that is not replicated, to my knowledge, anywhere else. Everyone there has a direct impact on the development of the house in Rio de Janeiro. I was at Antonio Dias's party—all night, dancing.

When the renovations are complete, Casa Daros will host a residency programme, a large-scale solo and group exhibition programme, continue to do their workshops, become a training school for artist educators, and, in the future, develop courses and curriculum to function as a school. But also, because of the residencies, they want to have artists live at Casa Daros three to six months at a time so that the artists can inflect the general ethos of life in the school—artists run the “house of Daros”. For instance, they want the artists’ presence to transform the way things are done, the way things are taught, and the kind of structure they determine. Right now, what they do on a weekly basis is invite critics, curators, members of the community, educators from schools, youth, to come and talk about what it is to be an “art educator” and what is meant by “art education”. The people who come, openly discuss what it is they want from Casa Daros and how Casa Daros can function and fulfill a need that is brought forth by the people of Rio de Janeiro. That helps to shape what they do. When you meet with the Director of Research and Education, Eugenio, along with his partner Isabella Nunes, the General Manager of Casa Daros, you truly get a sense of how important all of these components are to shaping the nature of the institution. Nunes says, “The proposal of Casa Daros is an open space to provide tools and to draw in people. What interests us is precisely what may emerge from these meetings.”

The meetings are designed to attract people to the house, but it’s really what happens in the dynamic of all these people coming together that matters most to the development of Casa Daros. And when I talk about “all these people”, I mean hosting workshops for youth in...well, in recycled parts of the building at present—this, however, is a direct link back to the history of the building—for instance, they’ve taken out all the windows from the core building (for replacement) and commissioned a local artist to build a space out of them, which currently functions as the workshop space. And Iran do Espirito Santo, with all the debris from the construction, will create a public work on site before the opening of the building scheduled for fall ‘08. They’re reusing all their materials and adding to them new resources, always looking at the past while moving forward into the future.

If you go on a tour of the current renovations with Eugenio, he spends a lot of

time talking about what was behind this or that wall, or what was discovered when they took this or that down, and for which this or that space was used. This is key to the future construction plans of the building. For instance, the space that was originally the dormitory for orphans will be the artists' residences. They want to connect to and make comment on the past manifestations of the building and then reinvigorate them today through contemporary art strategies, right down to the redevelopment of the building. The architectural plan is intended to create an interior space that is horizontal. So, for instance, from the residences, you might see the exhibition space, and from this perspective, you see youth working on projects, and they see you, so it's constantly—it's not as if the exhibition space is on the main floor—the offices are above, the workshops below—in the basement or off-site, etc. It is far more integrated and considered, so that all multifaceted events happening are completely visible to one another. I think what is really important about Casa Daros is that, from the ground up, they are revisioning a new tradition.

Right now, the offices of Casa Daros are in the old bathrooms of the orphanage so they joke that all of their most important work is happening right now in the toilet!

The Etc-Institution

I am going to now move into a discussion about the AGYU, which I will call the etc-institution, based on the initial definitions presented to you at the beginning of the seminar. The AGYU is an institution that questions the nature and function of its role. Through innovation, advocacy, and following the principles and strategies of contemporary artists, the AGYU for the past five years has started to transform the role and function of a public university—affiliated contemporary art gallery. We call that being “Out There”.

Our “Out There” vision developed from the practical need to transform the perception—the misperception—that AGYU (or York University for that matter) was too far to go to see cutting-edge contemporary art. We were too far; we were “out there... all the way out there.” We made “Out There” our slogan . And now we can say, “Yeah, we are out there.” (All the way!)

Audience member “Out there” means in the campus?

Well, “out there” from the downtown (but also out there within the context of the university community). This is the constant issue regarding York University’s placement in the city, as if the centre of Toronto is downtown. But it is also this idea that to be “out there” means something other than mainstream. We at AGYU are starting to think we are the centre both in relationship to the city (as we work more and more in the Jane and Finch community), and as innovators within the context of the contemporary art institution.

In 2003, when I, along with Director Philip Monk, came to the AGYU, we started our *Out There* campaign, not only to raise the profile of the gallery and reunite a then alienated Toronto art community with the AGYU, but also to make the AGYU a leading contemporary art space in the international art world. We were creatively transforming ourselves by questioning the very nature of the role and function of the public art gallery: what does it do, how does it serve its public? And then: what is a public gallery at a university? Could it automatically serve a pedagogical function, and could it automatically be slightly outside of any tradition or format? Could it, for instance, have a multifaceted mandate that is about many different publics, including students, faculty, but also the surrounding environment? Could it be an activist?

As we began to work differently with artists, and beyond our exhibitions, our *Out There* vision transformed every aspect and function of an art institution into an intellectual endeavour and artistic project. For instance, the Performance Bus. This was an initiative that I started in 2003 to try and bring people “out there” to the gallery. I’m just going to show some video as I talk.

[video clip of Panda Spa Ulysses Castellanos]

This is an excerpt from a Performance Bus entitled *Panda Spa* by Toronto artist Ulysses Castellanos (April 2007.) The Performance Bus was intended to function both as a marketing tool—to bring people up to our openings—and as a way to bring the Toronto art community together in an uninterrupted forty-five-minute-to-an-hour journey to the gallery. It was to carve out a space—a social space on

a school bus—for passengers to create an experience with an artist, and for the venue to be a space for the artist to gain a different kind of access to audiences. The Performance Bus involves (and implicates) the art community in the journey “out there”. We bring people together on the bus and then together they come to the AGYU—it is a statement we are trying to make with our programming.

For this particular bus, Ulysses manicured passengers’ nails. Everyone on the bus came to the opening with these really long, hand-painted nails. You could see the people that travelled on the Performance Bus that night—and, incidentally, it *does* change the dynamic of the people after they arrive at the opening: they tend to stick together in groups and I think there is a direct link to having just gone through forty-five minutes of collective activity (and it gets pretty extreme.) It is quite special. While it began as a marketing and outreach tool, the Performance Bus has become an autonomous venue in its own right. Artists now come to me and say, “I know what I’d do on the Performance Bus.” You know, they think about this—it’s amazing.

I am going to show you some projects commissioned for our *Vitrines*, one of our other off-site or “performative programming-in-public” venues, located on the northeast side of the Accolade East building, along the exterior of the AGYU gallery. I suppose these vitrines could be interpreted as an advertising space (and indeed I think this was the original intention for the three spaces), but we’ve turned them into a unique, site-specific exhibition programme where we commission a new work by a local artist and then collect it. You have to realize that there’s no money to collect actively at any place in Canada, but we’ve tried to create situations (creative solutions) that can transform even art-institutional matter: our collection, our marketing materials, and our membership brochures, for example, all transformed through the activities undertaken in collaboration with artists at the AGYU. These are creative strategies that move the institution into new, often uncharted, territories.

Eventually, working with artists and learning from them infiltrated all institutional activities. By working collaboratively with artists in an open and ongoing process, the institution became increasingly creative and integrative in all its activities. At

the AGYU, every institutional function is treated as equally artistic and pedagogic, most of all the functions that we take to be the least pedagogic and artistic, such as, for instance, marketing or patron cultivation.

As a curator, I am not interested as much in proving a thesis of my ideas and articulating them in a group exhibition of artworks centered on that theme. Rather, I am interested in how my actions as a curator can provide moments and situations for artist's work to not only be shown, but also activated. In this sense my work is akin to an art practice that takes place (takes shape) inside an institution—it is performative. In this work, I am also simultaneously aware of the impact of these actions, and that the art practices of the artists I work with can transform the very nature of the AGYU organization/institution. I am also aware of how different curatorial practices that are responsive to artists' practice can reflect and inflect different audiences for the artists' work and for contemporary art in a general and very specific way. This way of working has the potential to transform the way art is received (and by whom and where) and under which conditions we participate in it. It is important work to be done at an art institution (and at a university for that matter.)

Integration of all activities means breaking all preconceived, traditional boundaries and social relations, especially those between artists and their audiences in order to bring them more intimately together. Learning from artists, we teach the public in all we do, which comes back to the university.

Here's another vitrine. *[slide of Derek Sullivan's Robert Smithson/Robert Smith project]*

This is in our lobby. You can see that, in here, some of our vitrine matter is in our bookstore, and that's totally an intervention by an artist who has redone the retail of our lobby.

Philip Monk And also discounted the books. *[laughter]*

Emelie Chhangur And he discounted all the books, yeah. To make them more accessible. It is a project by Toronto artist Derek Sullivan.

And this is the piece that's currently up, by Bruno Billio, who's a Toronto artist. You can see it right now at the AGYU until June 2008.

Philip Monk

There are three vitrines, so they form a narrative. They're all linked together.

This image is of the AGYU's January 2007 newsletter, which is a quarterly publication, intended to inform our membership of upcoming activities and report on recent events. You can see this is very unlike traditional institutional material. For instance, on the right [of this slide] is the advertisement for the discounted art books—that was the back of our newsletter—and the front of our newsletter, which folded up, was really a broadsheet and political statement. Philip wrote a text about the fact that money, which is made on the backs of artists' initiatives, is never received directly by artists. So this was a performance—a performance by an institution in order to make a political statement. A Director's Message if you will... this, however, wasn't real. We were not really creating a proposal for a tax in support of Toronto artists—we were merely following the strategies of artists Matthew Brannon and Derek Sullivan, who were exhibiting at this time. We were turning our newsletter into a political message, and we postered this all over downtown, especially on Bay Street, the financial district of downtown Toronto. In fact we targeted, through our poster campaign, specific areas that we wanted to juxtapose with our message—along Queen Street West, for instance, with the whole redevelopment of the area for condominium construction: artists moved into the neighbourhood, it became regentrified and then popular; soon, another class of people entirely buy out the community. This is why A Gentil Carioca's relationship to their community is so important for us to look to as a model. It is also important in the context of our other "local" community, Jane and Finch, which I will get to shortly.

In October 2005, I put the AGYU into the newly developed Artist-in-Residency (AIR) programme at the Drake Hotel, creating work that we would show "in our hotel room" for the Toronto Alternative Art Fair International (TAFFI) in November. While the institution was in residency, we invited artists Matthew Brannon

and Liam Gillick “into our room”, and poached in on different artists that were already working there, including their full-time staff. This membership brochure was designed by the Drake’s in-house designer, Ken Ogawa, who we continue to work with today. You can see our membership brochure has none of the institutional-speak that you would expect. And it’s interactive. You can actually follow the symbols along, and cut it out, and send in your membership. Included in this brochure are messages like, “Everyone is an artist”, rather than [*staid voice*] “This is what it is to support contemporary art. At this level, you will receive this.”

It is cheeky, fun, and playful. Who knew how it would turn out? We told Ken he could do anything he wanted for the brochure. He went deluxe! He designed a four-colour brochure—there they are—RGB: three colour dots on the front. He was even playing around with the institution, as if to say, “Sure, you want a beautiful membership brochure? Here it is with your three colours.” And even having a black-and-white image of—I mean, look at the image. It’s a piece by Will Munro and Jeremy Laing. It was a performance they did at the AGYU and the documentation from it is beautiful—that is why we choose it for the brochure!—but, you know, I’m not aware of too many institutions who would choose to reproduce this image in their membership brochure in any way! That’s being *Out There*!

Being *Out There* at AGYU means we integrate programming, outreach, audience development, marketing, and education, conceiving them pedagogically as intertwined vehicles of artistic practice and modelling them on artists’ strategies.

The Etc-Institution Pedagogy and Programming

It is also through our education programme (becoming increasingly important to our work with Brazil) that we aim to transform and emphasize the pedagogical role of contemporary art, both in practice (through our programmes) and theory (through collaborative research), in the context of the university (working with the education department, and I will discuss later our work with Casa Daros) and outside, in the context of Toronto.

Over the past year, the AGYU has developed a unique series of groundbreaking arts education and outreach programmes with youth in the Jane and Finch Com-

munity that take their cue from the principles and strategies of contemporary art practices. In projects such as *Looking at the Overlooked* (a book-making project) and *Black Creek United*, which I will talk briefly about today, practicing artists work in a mentorship dynamic with youth, who experience art-making in a hands-on process (rather than teaching them about a history of art or even about the artists showing at the AGYU, for example). The programmes are designed to empower youth through artistic expression, experimentation, and discovery within their local context. We are also interested in transforming the perceptions of what art education can and should be while investing in the local context of our surrounding neighbourhoods. This is often at the intersection of our collaborations with other faculties on York University campus.

For *Black Creek United*, AGYU educator Allyson Adley, who is entirely responsible for all of the off-site education initiatives the AGYU currently undertakes, worked with community artists Liz Forsberg and Laura Reinsborough and The Spot: the Jane and Finch Family and Community Centre to conduct a story-telling and visual-arts workshop that took the form of a series of exploratory walks along the Black Creek that physically (and quite literally) connected, and now perhaps re-charted, the path between the campus and the Black Creek community.

[slides from Black Creek United]

Inspired by the principles of psychogeography, youth were encouraged to tell stories, create impromptu art interventions using found materials on site, and take photographs for an exhibition that took place at the AGYU and the Yorkwood Library. The workshops, walks, and play culminated in a community-led walk where youth encourage, and inspired members of the public/community to create works and share stories as they walked along the path carved out by the youth in the preceding three months.

Looking forward: AGYU, together with Casa Daros, currently working on an international residency-exchange programme. Our twofold objectives—of facilitating artist projects and articulating the pedagogical nature of contemporary art in collaboration with individuals and institutions in Latin America—are integrated in a

project that will have two ongoing and ever-related research paths: on the one hand, experimental artist residencies with diverse social effects and, on the other, pedagogical research that will translate into education curricula. We are currently working with Marcio Botner and Eugenio Valdés Figueroa (their residency at AGYU begins in January 2009) to transform education initiatives, outreach programmes for youth, and together have a fundamental impact on the education curriculum of postsecondary and graduate students at York University that uses Latin America as a model and puts contemporary art at the foreground of their research and teaching practice.

I hope you will continue to be inspired by the work that we do at AGYU and that this presentation has opened your eyes to the possibilities and potential of a university-affiliated public art gallery that seeks its inspiration and working methodologies from artists and other models found in Latin America.

Presented at Brazilian Seminar Study Group, York University, April 9, 2008.