

In the same show stood a huge yellow empty tomb. Kitty says she's drawn to the tomb as a motif because it's quite literally an intermediary point between architecture and the body, a 'living place for the dead' as she puts it. I was drawn hungrily to this particular tomb by the perfectly rendered lettuce sandwich she'd placed casually atop it. When I suggest that Philip K. Dick had found some solace in a concept he'd come to call 'the ham sandwich of reality', Kitty mentions that her sandwich was originally intended to contain some ham-looking plastic substance too! Dick's sandwich posited man as one slice of bread, 'god' as the other, and the lump of processed ham sitting between them as the yucky stuff of reality we'd have to thoroughly masticate in order to achieve enlightenment, whatever that could be. Dick, with all of his crazed interrogations of reality and questionings of what constituted the authentic human being, would have made the perfect interlocutor for Clark's work. No matter he's dead, there's now a fully functioning automaton we could appropriately repurpose for the task.

V.

At a recent exhibition at À CÔTÉ DU 69 in Nantes, France, Clark exhibited the formative garments and soft furnishings of her own esoteric clothing label emblazoned with the gothic capitals I.D.S.T. (If Destroyed Still True), which, she was quick to point out, meant something very specific to her although the acronym might mean something very different to me, or indeed anyone else who'd like to adopt and evolve the brand in their own direction. While the primarily beige garments took on the appearance of tracksuits designed for the express purpose of relaxation, a series of large throw cushions and a human-sized dog basket seemed to smear the concept beyond the immediacy of the body into a doughy brand-scape, a plush habitat for lifestyle loungers. Set into one of the cushions, an animatronic silicon tongue – again, modeled on the artist's own – gyrated with awkward sensuality, like the distended mouth organ of a rabid Looney Tune, a commodity that's practically salivating to perform, to deliver on every promise.

I'm intrigued by this mode of self-production, of this articulation of brand as something that can be inhabited in the manner of a fantasy kingdom, a utopian suburb, even a spacious tomb. I ask if it's important for Kitty to position herself on the inside of these cultural machinations as both purveyor and consumer, if there's a relationship between earlier interests in the total environments of theme-park artifice and the brand as a kind of habitat? 'They are totally linked in a very base human desire for community and power,' she says, 'desperately searching for a sense of belonging and control.' Clark finds herself quite naturally wanting to be on the inside of this kind of phenomena because she too desires those things. Her interest however piques at the point 'where that desire fails somehow, or reveals itself and ruins the illusion that it's working.' The work becomes in effect, the waking lamentation for some lost dream.

VI.

In the window of the Nantes show, Kitty reproduced a short story on a panel smeared with adhesive and bracketed by fluorescent purple bug zappers. While the eventual accumulation of dead flies would mark 'a very obvious indication of a laborious passage of time,' the text was

a charming near-future narrative situated in 'that messy space between now and the future, the space that's not really documented in slick sci-fi visions'. It was an imaginal locale that seemed perfectly contemporaneous with Kitty's practice, with its modest robotic experiments and tentative exercises in world building. It read: The rain today is really getting to me i thought that documents couldnt spoil since the e-paper revolution but guess again i guess, i discovered a bag of soggy suds a minute ago. apparently there is a gluey substance that can react to water in the coating formula and the mixture attracts pests to the office. what a distraction, when u got a broken boss breathing down ur back for the next pile of numbers like a fan thats on turbo, the last thing you need is a bunch of rodents sniffing around the candy bars i got stashed in my cabinet. i would bring my dog in to serve look out but i dont liek the way people behave when you bring some thing from the "outside" "in".

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Review in Retrospect – Art & Language's 'The Air-Conditioning Show' (1967–1972)
Hannah Gregory

'Ventilation is the profound secret of existence' writes Peter Sloterdijk in his 'Foreword to the Theory of Spheres' (2004). His philosophy of our 'air/condition' readdresses the implicit importance of atmosphere as a vital envelope, to 'bring the atmospheric dimension back to the perception of the real.' For Art & Language, air-conditioning, or 'atmosphere-explication', to borrow Sloterdijk's term, is equally instrumental – here to represent the realities of art production.

'The Air-Conditioning Show' took the form of an empty beige space within the Visual Arts Gallery, New York. Empty, that is, but for three air-conditioning vents, whose persistent whir could be perceived throughout the room. Art & Language wanted to present a kind of setting in homeostasis: appearances should be banal, outside noise minimised, and temperature ambient to the season.

In the conceptual text that preceded the installation, 'Remarks on Air-Conditioning' (published in *Arts Magazine* in 1967), Art & Language member Michael Baldwin outlined its parameters, which together would act to make the environment seem

as 'take-it-for-granted' as possible. Visitors should not actually be *chilled*, though you imagine the 'ultra-usualness' of the scene would have unnerved them. The exhibition's aim was retrospectively solidified at 'The Air-Conditioning Show Conference' (2008) as a critique of the way in which 'contemporary art fashions the episodes that keep capital interested.'

Air-conditioning has from its invention been a product and enabler of capital. The first modern air-conditioning system was installed to cool the New York Stock Exchange in 1902. Now it seamlessly sanctions the mall-hotel-leisure complexes of desert climates, and supports the infrastructure behind the internet, with aluminium 'chillers' attempting to counter the laws of thermodynamics from the roofs of data centres. In every computer, a fan. And in 1972, while skyscrapers in Manhattan were artificially ventilated, their high windows sealed closed, a gallery in Chelsea blew temperate air into a vacant room, and called that air art.

The machines that rippled the intangible entity through the gallery served as an infrastructural unveiling – but it was not that the group wanted to draw attention to their appearance (though according to Baldwin the units did have 'a gleam of technological modernity' to them). Nor was this about imbuing the space with a heightened, spiritual quality, as per Yves Klein's earlier immaterial gesture *Le Vide* ('The Void', 1957), which cleared out the gallery's interior behind an azure façade. The installation's normality was anti-mystique: the idea for what posed as an ephemeral or emperor's-new-clothes-like installation was to critique the neutrality of nothing, and instead raise the stakes of what it means to exhibit something. What would happen to the experience of art if the expectation of an encounter were replaced with a barely perceptible, almost phenomenological, status quo?

This first installation coincided with the growing prevalence of the white cube gallery, and the emergence of conceptual art out of Minimalism and site-specificity. The timeframe from initial text to actual apparition corresponds almost exactly with Lucy

Lippard's *Six Years, The Dematerialization of the Art Object, 1966–1972*, in which she describes the 'ideas in the air' that circulated during this period. Context became content, while context was seemingly neutralized between four white walls. In *Inside the White Cube* (1976), Brian O'Doherty drew attention to the illusion of this 'apparent neutrality'; how what seemed to be a clear space in fact subsumed 'esthetics and commerce, art and audience.' In their model of 'non-exhibition' and the humorous paradox at its base, Art & Language sought to critique the supposed clean slate of such systems of display, while testing how far it was possible to operate at a remove.

Treating the air as thing reverses the willful disappearance of context in the art space, while attention to the precise physical conditions of the situation makes clear our anthropocentric conditions for living. The techno-thermal nature of the installation explicates the link between capital and the individual's experience of art: capital – via technology – exerts control on production, artistic, or otherwise; this production exerts a control over space, in the case of air-conditioning, forming climactic envelopes. The emblem of air-con highlights our sensitivity as homeotherms, with the space of the art gallery a prime example of our need to – as Benjamin wrote on the form of the arcade – 'shape and re-shape a casing for ourselves.'

Amid environmental anxieties, the value of space, and our sensitivity to temperature, feels pressing. Air-conditioning, perhaps now even more than at the work's inception, represents both the regulated airs of the art world and our vulnerability as humans in the wider atmosphere. The group's declaration of 'a volume of (free) air' was to consider the price of a conceptual gesture and its projected ambiance; to ask, what if air, as much as land or water, required rent?

Eric says he tries to be *art brut* as he makes his work. I'm guessing he's referring to a level of expression uninhibited by doubt. Eric (Ellefsen) is a friend living in Tokyo. He has an exceptionally worldly background, born to Japanese and Norwegian parents and growing up between Singapore and the UK. This journey chimes with my own biography straddling different cultures, born in Kenya to Indian parents and growing up in the suburbs of London. Added to his naturally affirming presence, the relay of speaking to someone eight hours in the future is unusually grounding. Our exchanges help make sense of both our diasporic histories, amongst a global population in flux, which finds a provisional resting place online. Our latest Skype conversations have circulated around his work with Aiseikai and Tokyo Brut, charities which promote the work of artists residing in medical facilities across Japan, as well as Eric's own informal art-making. He told me recently he'd taken a midnight walk to tag a wall with some of his artwork using temporary glue made from flour, sugar and water. 'It's all very powerful!' he joked, admitting that not being afraid made his direct action possible. He returned a few days later to see if the posters were still there and found a skateboarder peering at them. After casually initiating conversation with him, Eric was tickled to report back how the skater had marvelled: 'Whoever made this must have been really high!'

The one-way street of art brut and outsider art is defined from those on the inside as unattainably desirable. It is exalted and exoticised for its purity of expression untainted by the influence of formal education and the professional art market. Since Jean Dubuffet coined the term over 70 years ago (the English translation of art brut as 'outsider' came later, in the 1970s), artists pre-determined as such have struggled to get past this enclosure of their work. Simplified, the separation between inside and outside allows the insiders, the history-makers and moneymakers, to maintain their power by assimilating control over its circulation.

In embracing star-artists like Oscar Murillo and Banksy, the market co-opts the outside into the mainstream that it otherwise defines itself against. Once inside, the value of works formerly outside accrues through various stamps of authenticity. This happens either cynically, nurturing the cult of the artist's personality and the uniqueness of the art object in order to justify the price, or critically poring over details of contextual interpretation. Yet, apart from their unshakable brand, the majority of artists of art brut remain nameless. Whether due to the artists choosing to opt out of discussions or due to their physical incapacity to opt in, it's hard to find out a back story, or to start to talk about their motivations. In the absence of words to describe the work, it becomes charged with a semi-mythical status beyond culture, bordering on fetish.

For artists with developmental or psychotic prognoses, or those institutionalised in prisons, their materials are mostly remedial – pens, crayons and paper – which allows for prolific production. With a steady supply of materials, their basic practical needs are met and they are looked after in this respect. But for artists who are also patients, it's a strange sort of autonomy when you realise that their copyright is held by their next of kin and legal guardians, not by the artists themselves.