



Untitled,
Nico Dockx,
2003,
variable,
mixed media.

In collaboration with
Hans Ulrich Obrist &
Jean-Michel Meyers

Artist, archivist, film-maker, librarian, curator, graphic designer, translator...the list is long but any one of these and all of them together could be used to describe the creative activity of Nico Dockx. But actually, relentless collaborator might be the single most accurate to describe this young artist. His aesthetic practice persistently develops alongside and in relation to others- he grows archives from both personal memories and other people's materials, he inserts his own library into a public one, he edits films, installations and other works from the layers of sound and multiple vantage points that emerge from working closely with his friends. From *Laboratorium* (with Barbara Vanderlinden) to most recently *Utopia Station* (with Molly Nesbit and Rirkrit Tiravanija) at the Venice Biennale, curator Hans Ulrich Obrist has followed the development of Nico Dockx's work and they now speak about slowness, inspiration, working methods, and all the rest.

text by Elena Filipovic

Hans Ulrich Obrist: From what I know about your practice, you have simultaneous activities in different disciplines. You are working as an artist in the art context, and at the same time you are a graphic designer, and you are also working as a curator, and I 'm sure that you have many other practices. I'm interested about this very general question as to whether there has been some kind of shift happening?

Nico Dockx: Personally, I think that all spontaneous changes and unpredictable shifts within the evolution of my role as an artist slowly grew within the architectural context of my personal archives. In the summer of 1997, I went to the School of the

Museum of Fine Arts in Boston to continue my artistic research and to explore new landscapes, perhaps to be away from my fixed position as a student at the art academy in Antwerpen. As soon as I started this journey, I began to collect many new pregnant experiences, a sort of motion that carried me 'elsewhere'- not an 'elsewhere' that was given to me beforehand, but something unexpected, something that turned me into a multitude of directions, like air through which sounds travel.

Is your obsession with archival working processes something which allows you to be very interdisciplinary? Is the archive the place where it all meets? [it is now 15h41]

I believe that every work is always the collection of its performative appearances and personal integrities. I consider my personal archives as a network of collaborations, polylogues and interactions with others, creating this notion of the unstable archive, where every single conversation is being replaced by another-travelling like a film. I am also very curious to see other people's architectures of time as a dynamic feedback loop towards my own work. To learn how to use these organically growing archives of mine, which actually result in immobile accumulations of papers and other storages of data, in a more flexible way- perhaps to let its memory go and to build an archive on the move. So last year, when I was designing and publishing my first independent publication (CURIOUS/cure001, Antwerpen 2001), I was invited by Chris Dercon to work in his personal archives at the Museum Boijmans Van Beunigen in Rotterdam. Those experiences- to walk through his personal letters, articles, and other correspondence that he uses as inspiration to write texts, to organize exhibition projects, and to rethink the politics of the museum (and which, actually, resulted in a sort of interview in between the both of us) - were a nice opportunity to discover new perspectives in relation to the 'how and what' of self-organization and interior complexity. I believe the same happens in this interview, no? We know each other through other people's archives (an archive within an archive), through email conversations, etc. So the archive is a kinetic instrument for communication and connecting with the 'other'. Perhaps, one day, I would like to investigate your personal notes and archives. What do you think?

Today, I think, the ultimate archive for an

artist, curator, or architect is the laptop. Francisco J.Varela once said: "Like a computer, the infolding monster, everything is falling in there; my laptop now contains half of my life." [laughs]

I totally agree. If I would have a laptop, it would definitely contain half of my life and my personal archives would be more flexible- perhaps? [laughs]

It's a very private thing. So let's say if someone sends you an email, it also becomes part of your archive?

Yes, that could happen. My archives, I believe, are a mixture of many different private constellations and personal uncanny alchemies. But at the moment this archive has never been shown publicly. Of course, if you ask me if you can have look and keep it for a few days to read its contents more carefully, the answer is yes. Sometimes people rediscover their own personal letters to me when they are leafing their hands through my archives and feel a little bit offended or weird. And I can really understand their personal feelings and worries, but at the same time, I think it is important that we learn to throw off these protective clothes.

So, ultimately there might be no trace of the original archive, but just a translation of a translation. I also saw you at the Museum Boijmans Van Beunigen in



Rotterdam, where you were just about to finish an experimental installation project retinal.optical.visual.conceptual, for which you had assisted Sarat Maharaj, Eeke Bonk, and Richard Hamilton, experimenting with display in relation to Duchamp's notes/ notations and Hamilton's mappings of Duchamp. And, I am very interested to know how much importance you place on the notion of translation within an exhibition format because, so far, the exhibition has not played a major role in your work.

That's right, the exhibition hasn't played a major role in my work. So far, I have consciously decided not to participate within this ongoing instrumentalization of art through over-exposed exhibition displays and cultural consumerism. But, I have intensively studied curatorial strategies and experimental exhibition displays through multiple readings and research... in order to see how it might be possible to present, translate, and circulate my personal thoughts and archives within the various formats of an exhibition/ installation. [the time is 15h55] I think, this collaboration with Richard Hamilton was a good start, a first meeting.

Apart from Hamilton, who are the other artists influencing your work?

That's a sudden and difficult question. This year it has mainly been this Greek filmmaker, Theo Angelopoulos, who feels that montage can be created through the continuous shot, involving time and movement. In his cinematic sequences and landscapes, time becomes space and space becomes time. All you need is just a little patience.

So slowness is a recurrent concern for you?

At the moment, I feel like we do not know how to spend time anymore. There is just space, your cv forwarded here and there, no proof of any biographical passage. But, what about a space where some stairs lead to nothing, a place which leads to find the invisible, the impossible, and... the time of waiting. When duration is retained in view, we have shifting relationships, passages of time, and unexpected ruptures- like, for example, Masami Akita [Merzbow]'s slow compositions of sounds and noise.

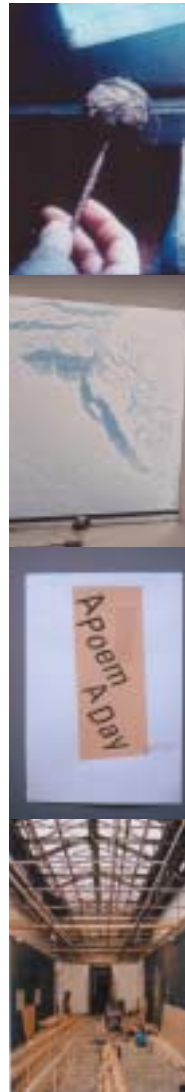
Is this a nice title for this interview: "A New Slowness"? The first object of yours that I saw was a map, which was some kind of instrument, some kind of tool, not only for articulating your archive but, also for its

possible distribution and dissemination. It had the following title **CURIOS/**, and, indeed, I was very curious to know more about this map. This interview has some map immanency in the sense that what we are recording today will go into the second map. Could you talk about this series of maps? [the time is now 16h00]

Well, I consider these personal mapping systems as a sort of sedimentation/crystallization process coming from my archival research, creating a sort of interior complexity of multiple networks, meeting places, ongoing conversations, mutual understandings, flexible architectures, and..., especially, compassion and love. It is, indeed, a series of maps because I named the first publication **cure001**, a first gesture towards consistency but independent from any predetermined time-line within its production stage. According to me, the unfolding character and playful designs of these maps are an interesting and challenging way to investigate different rhythms of accessibility and, especially, compatibility in both the reading and writing process of such an object. If you unfold the map, you experience a multitude of readings depending on your interaction with the object; on how you fold, unfold, and refold the map, constantly building, unbuilding, and rebuilding connections in between its different textures. Or, perhaps, some people just hang it on the wall. It all depends on the viewer's journey through this strange landscape of exchange.

So the map is a plan to stick to? Is it a metaphor?

I like to work in a very straightforward, do-it-yourself way where the work becomes an honest situation of small noises, back-and-forth movements, fluctuations, and oscillations, constantly questioning and rethinking its own limits and identity. Perhaps very close to my skateboarding skills from the past, this fluidity of movement, intuition and innovation, selection and (re)identification, mixing and remixing dynamic and static elements in an endless variation- enabling yourself to create knowledge in every part of your body, both physically and mentally, experimenting with different scales of duration. We urgently need to challenge and explore new formats of production and circulation of ideas, where the notion of the laboratory condition is not so much linked to a clearly defined outcome (or social design) but rather functions as an essentially undefined architecture of unpredictable and



cryptical working and thinking processes- maybe rendering visible the invisible. So I decided to use the map as my possible free space of dynamic interaction and non-hierarchical dialogue, perhaps, like a crystal, by its very nature, a temporal phenomenon that causes disturbances and irregularities (noise?), polluting data with continual fluctuations and instabilities. My work is a product of circumstances, a biography of time where design and growth are one entity.

How do you conceive the economy of your projects?

Most of the time my projects are 'zero' calculations, and..., at the moment, I am trying to create my own self-structuring economy where one project of mine generates, funds and supports another one, and the next one, and so on. I think, it is very similar to my friends' record label, called Conspiracy Records & Distribution, founded in 1993 in Antwerpen. Even

though they are considered and respected as one of the best underground music labels in Europe at this very moment, they still don't make that much of a living out of this intensive, collective activity. So sometimes I try to use my contacts and channels of financial support, as an artist, to help friends and to organize more radical and experimental sound releases, publications, and collaborative projects.

Which is a kind of *détournement*. I'm rereading Asger Jorn and, that is very interesting because, as a painter, he became quite successful at a certain moment in time, and with the money that his paintings provided him, he then developed book projects. He, for example, commissioned a photographer to photograph the golden images of medieval art in the North, and he also made a book on folk art in Greenland, which is very beautiful. At the same time he supported a Situationist project. Your form of *détournement* involving artist's grants is interesting. Returning to the notion of slowness: apart from Theo Angelopoulos, what other formats of slowness interest you?

I think, for example: Richard Hamilton's readings, Félix Gonzalez-Torres' phoenixes of light, Abbas Kiarostami's views throughout a car window, Mark Luyten's walks like snow, Gaston Bachelard's dreams of elasticity, Gordon Matta-Clark's editing, Hélio Oiticica's colors, and Douglas Park's tectonics... and there are many of course many others.

And what about the network of your own generation? Could you tell me about the exchanges you have with other artists, your processes of collaboration, of involving other people?

For most of the time, these collaborations and networks of mine are mainly driven by my strong curiosity towards the other and the unexpected coming-together of the unconnected. Very often, I think, wonderful projects start with these kind of chance meetings in between people, something that comes like a complete surprise and challenge. And, I believe, such a moment should always be traced somewhere in the work. My personal network spontaneously grew through unfolding my archives and maps in many different directions, and that's how it reached other people, explored other landscapes, triggered multiple correspondences, and organized many meetings in between. Lots of its communication happened through email

conversations, but that is just one small element within the process of connecting different energies. I like to be curious, to observe, to collect, to meet people, and to be in constant flux, acting and interacting with others. And maybe afterwards a few people continue to work together and organize their own networks and collaborative projects so that they actually create a network within a network, like your reference to this notion of a Russian Matrushka doll.

I wanted to ask you about your rumor project for which I have invited you not so long ago when I curated "Rumor City/ Sonic City" as part of the exhibition called "Mutations".

It all started as a collection of email correspondences, an integral part of my archives. When I got your invitation to participate within your "Rumor City" project, I decided to rework (together with my girlfriend) all the emails I had received and collected within the last few months in order to rewrite together all these messages into another kind of text. We began to recycle and recompose the different emails like when you are sampling sounds- and, according to me, rumors function as a kind of sound or noise. It was a nice experience for me to read and reread every single mail of mine from the last three months and to see what kind of rumor it could construct by itself. My girlfriend had taken a lot of my printed emails with her to Antwerpen when she was visiting me in Nantes, so I missed a lot of the texts. So we organized simultaneous editing processes at different times and locations and exchanged our edited materials and information a few times by email in between both our lines of thought. Then, finally, we met again in Antwerpen to do the final edit together, and out of that we got what you could maybe call a poem. It had a kind of rhythm, something that spreads an abstract sound- perhaps a rumor? [the time is 16h12]

I was hoping to ask you about your unrealized projects, projects you have not yet had the time to realize, or projects which will be realized soon, or even projects which are too big or too small, which have been censored -- there are all kinds of reasons for unrealized projects. I wanted to ask about the unbuilt roads of Nico Dockx. Related to this idea of the unbuilt road, I believe that it is really necessary and important to take a very personal and radical position in relation to time, to create your own rhythm, maybe even to be invisible.

But, I feel, it is sometimes very difficult to realize within the context of this ongoing instrumentalization, speculation (a word invented by Douglas Park) and globalization of both our visual culture and communication, where branded group shows and art markets fluctuate with the same speeds and statistics as the stock market. But, then again, the question is always: "How to change, within the given parameters, the rules of the game"?

So It's a form of resistance to exhibiting?

It's not really a mode of creative resistance to exhibiting work. As you will have noticed, and if you look and listen carefully,



my work never really ends. All the work is a 'work in progress,' a kind of interior development/ rhythm that grows over time like a crystalline structure: to add, to subtract, to change, to translate, to edit... to transform. I suppose that means the making of the work, for me personally, represents a form of (re-)search. Perhaps it is very similar to Hakim Bey's essays, articulating small reflections that will last whole lifetimes because they went unnoticed, because they never intersected with the spectacle, never appeared outside that real life which is invisible to the agents of simulation. I think the strength of such a temporary autonomous zone lies in its invisibility and its will to power as disappearance- a simple act of realization and spontaneity. I believe in integrity as a whole life style: to live in the most simple but deeply felt way. The richness of your life depends on your playful sensitivity. I think it is important to sometimes say, "No, I can't do it". And maybe the work itself will let you know how, when, and where to resist.

So it's this notion of rhythm where it is about imposing your own rhythm on the world and not letting the world impose its rhythm on you. I think we are finished for the moment. Is there anything missing from this interview? If you would like to add something to the transcription, you can. (A Poem A Day)

So, that's the first part, to be continued soon. It has only just begun!

Yes, à l'infinif, not stopping anywhere because everything and everyone is interdependent. I am already looking forward to our next meeting and conversation. Thank you very much for sharing this time together.

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