

South

AS A STATE OF MIND

Maintenance

ISSUE 10
SUMMER/FALL 2018
EURO 15,00





South as a State of Mind #10

MAINTENANCE

www.southasastateofmind.com

Editor-in-Chief, Founding Director

Marina Fokidis

Guest Editor

Monika Szewczyk

Managing Editor

Jorgina Stamogianni

Copy Editors

Kimberly Bradley, Hannah Gregory

Online Editor

Federica Bueti

Contributors – Issue 10

Sandra Benites, Ángela Bonadies,

Ayse Çavdar, Christopher Cozier,

Angela Dimitrakaki, Marina Fokidis,

Miquel Martí Freixas, Jorge Garcia,

Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Pablo Lafuente,

Las Nietas de Nonó, Lucy R. Lippard,

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung,

Ana Pato, Koleka Putuma, Megha Ralapati,

Suely Rolnik, Jorgina Stamogianni,

Monika Szewczyk, Wisława Szymborska,

Juergen Teller, Yorgos Tzirtzilakis,

Marina Vishmidt

Translation

Vivian Mocellin, Joanne Namerou,

Mayra Rodríguez Castro, Joanna Trzeciak

Design

Studio Lialios Vazoura, Athens

Printing

Colorprint – Tsekouras Ltd, Athens

Paper

Munken Pure 90gsm, Munken Lynx 90gsm,

Munken Polar Rough 170gsm,

Opaque 43gsm

www.perrakispapers.gr

Editorial Committee

Sepake Angjama, Shumon Basar,

Kimberly Bradley, Federica Bueti,

Diana Campbell Betancourt,

Fabio Cypriano, Övül O. Durmusoglu,

Salvatore Lacagnina, Pablo Lafuente,

Pablo León de la Barra, Antonia Majaca,

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung,

Gabi Ngcobo, Gene Ray,

Marcelo Rezende, Ana Texteira Pinto,

Yorgos Tzirtzilakis, Misal Adnan Yildiz

Advisory Committee

Rasheed Araeen, Manthia Diawara,

Solange Farkas, Vicky Kanellopoulou,

Matthias Mühling, Stilpon Nestor,

Nikos Papastergiadis, Stefanie Peter,

Marieke Van Hal,

Chiona Xanthopoulou-Schwarz

Published by

Cube Art Editions

25 Argyroupoleos Street, 11471 Athens

E: info@cubearteditions.com

www.cubearteditions.com

Printed in Greece

ISSN: 2241-3901

ISBN: 978-618-5204-06-8

Supported by



Copyright

© 2018 South as a State of Mind,

the artists, the authors

All rights reserved.

Cover: Ángela Bonadies, *The Kitchen*, 2018

Still from video 8:34 min.

Contents

6–9

Editorial

10–23

The Abuse of Life

Matrix of the Colonial-Capitalistic Unconscious

Suely Rolnik

24–35

The Social Poltergeist

A Case Study of Maintenance Violence

Angela Dimitrakaki

36–59

Those Who Are Dead Are Not Ever Gone

On the Maintenance of Supremacy, the

Ethnological Museum and the Intricacies

of the Humboldt Forum

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung

60–63

Abandon to Keep

Ana Pato

64–73

A Way of Working Together

On Dja Guata Porã: Rio de Janeiro indígena

Sandra Benites and Pablo Lafuente

74–79

Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969!

Proposal for an Exhibition “Care”

Mierle Laderman Ukeles

80–91

Pure Maintenance

Marina Vishmidt

92–101

We Don’t Need Another Hero

10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art

I’m Not Who You Think I’m Not #6

Christopher Cozier, Koleka Putuma,

Las Nietas de Nonó

94–95

I’m Not Who You Think I’m Not a Manifesto

96–99

High Tide

Koleka Putuma

100–101

Foodtopia: Demonstrations During

Hunting Season

Las Nietas de Nonó

102–115

What is Pornomiseria?

Miquel Martí Freixas, Ángela Bonadies

and Luis Ospina

116–129

From Trespassing to Home

Lucy R. Lippard

130–137

Timekeepers: The European Golden Age, the

Mesoamerican Time of Darkness, and the New

Dawn of Indigenous Peoples

Jorge Garcia

138–143

Growing Cultures, Cultivating Attention

Megha Ralapati

144–153

Modernising Joy-Making Mourning

Select Theses on Contemporary Greek Culture

Yorgos Tzirtzilakis

154–160

How to Maintain a Burning Story?

Ayse Çavdar

161–167

The Kitchen

Ángela Bonadies

168

The End and the Beginning

Wisława Szymborska

170–178

Advertisements



Living root bridge ecosystem, 2013, Nongriat village, India
Photo by Sanjeev Shankar

Growing Cultures, Cultivating Attention

Megha Ralapati

There is more than one way to nurture the living root bridges of Meghalaya. Observe extra caution if using them to cross to some place ‘beyond the art world’ as we, the individuals, understand it.

A peculiar ficus tree is native to the southern part of Meghalaya, the northeastern Indian state, from which rise the mighty snow-clad Himalayan mountains. The *ficus elastica*, also called rubber fig trees, evolved to live in this area, which experiences extreme wet weather for much of the year. Heavy monsoons and flash-flooding are regular occurrences, which make life for the Khasi and Jaintia tribes who call this region home at times unpredictable and highly vulnerable. The massive ficus plants, however, survive and thrive under such conditions. Powerful weather forces constantly shape, reshape and sculpt their thin, pliable roots, which anchor the trees securely to uneven, sometimes steep surfaces.

Like the trees, humans in the region seek to sustain life in such wet conditions. Adaptation is essential to their survival as a people. Locals must have observed the trees’ unique tendencies to bend along with weather patterns, rather than resist them. As tall skyscrapers are often built to sway along with the wind, the rubber trees of Meghalaya demonstrate a physical nimbleness that locals recognised. The result of this attention is

a brilliantly holistic system for human navigation of ever-changing, often dangerous terrain on foot. Here, the Khasi and Jaintia have developed an original design and construction process for a series of bridges connecting otherwise isolated rural areas. While we don’t know exactly when the practice began, living root bridges persist as a community based, ecologically-adaptive process of building. Over decades, people coax malleable, tender tree roots by hand across rivers and streams that are otherwise difficult to traverse.

What follows is an ostensibly simple process of weaving roots when they are young and most tender, which maximises their load-bearing capacity in maturity. Once roots take hold in the soil of an opposing riverbank, it’s a matter of time, usually one or two generations, for them to fortify to the point of bearing human weight. A beautiful thing happens among some trees, in which two or more independent ones grow together just by living in close proximity to each other or touching. Inosculation, the process when two trees become one, has been embraced by the human bridge builders,

encouraging the plants to further bolster the strength of their constructions. Once mature, living root bridges are incredibly robust under the harshest of conditions and become host to other plant and animal life. This is symbiosis of the highest order: among humans and trees, among these and smaller forms of life.

Of course, trees have been processed for wood all over the world for the age-old practice of bridge-building. Living root bridges are different because as the name indicates, they are living, growing and evolving alongside the humans and other life forms in their proximity; these organisms exist in an ongoing state of living together and caring for each other. Weaving tree roots to create bridges doesn't superimpose an unnatural state on the plants. Instead, in ideal conditions, one of these bridges sustains and flourishes in bridge-form just as a healthy tree would, constantly renewing and strengthening itself as secondary roots germinate and commit themselves more deeply to the earth.¹

In periods of emergency or extreme weather, living root bridges provide essential infrastructure for connecting disparate populations. They model resilience and interdependence among life forms of vastly differently scale. This is not an individual practice but a collective one, which, through its implementation, can be understood to nourish the community and larger ecosystem. Because bridges take decades to mature and can live for centuries, the practice of aiding their construction must be passed down between generations through the processes of making-together and learning-together. One generation begins a structure that only its grandchildren will be able to use. No one author claims the bridge; in fact, the practice explodes the concept of enjoying the fruits of one's individual labour. Bridges are built as a tool (and gift) directed towards the future, so long as the deep attention required for their cultivation can last a lifetime. As a form of weaving, it's also a craft practice essential to the collective life of a community.

Is this a new form of making? A new approach to creation? Dare I say, a new way of making art? Imagine an art object not easily commodified and monetised, which does not circulate—either through the art market or the international biennial circuit—because it

only exists in specific environments and for a singular context. Consider living root bridges as the highest form of social practice. It goes without saying that the architects themselves are unconcerned with the circulation of their work or photo credits. They're unbothered by the boundary between art-making and survival strategy; the line between care and creation.

Despite their grandeur and sophistication, the bridges were never built to be seen by any form of public outside those who utilise and nurture them. In fact, it's daunting and dangerous to even catch a glimpse, and those interested rely on a few photographs to study this animate architecture. Where exactly does art live inside these majestic structures?

I met an artist several years ago who initially drew my attention to these wondrous constructions, and I was fascinated by his efforts to anchor the roots of a creative practice as deeply as the bridges themselves. Sanjeev Shankar describes himself as an architect-artist-scientist-explorer. He has been so moved by the bridges that, for years, he has cultivated a regular practice of spending time in Meghalaya to observe, meditate and participate in the process, to understand how a community can labour together through an intergenerational practice of sharing, weaving, learning.

His goal in studying living root bridges is, in part, to share the knowledge developed in this remote region with others living in similarly wet terrain or with those in entirely different climates, affirming the fundamental connection between humans and our climate. The research also provides a model for his work, which spans architecture, contemporary craft practice, photography, public sculpture and academic scientific inquiry. Shankar views the practice of building living root bridges as deeply philosophical, particularly in its collapse of the separation between people and nature, art and life practice. This philosophy, in turn, nourishes his own practice as a long-term, sustained

form of learning and producing. He considers the time frame for art projects as necessarily extended and prolonged in order to fully understand the context in which they are taking place. He seeks to develop ideas, which can evolve and be maintained over generations, resisting notions of efficiency, speed or ease of transmission. Nothing about this process is fast or simple to communicate. In fact, it is this slowness and slipperiness that appeals to Shankar.

Shankar's own artistic and design projects attempt to achieve these philosophical and fundamental aims. *Yoga Temple* (2016) is a functional structure that Shankar designed, housed within an eco-focused wellness resort located in a wet, tropical region of southwest India. It is meant to provide local and visiting populations both a sacred and secular space for contemplation, meditation and prayer. The monolithic stone architecture references traditional South Indian temples, and the particular clay roof tiles allow light to filter into the space, which references the yogi's long journey seeking enlightenment. The process of creating *Yoga Temple*, Shankar writes:

[E]volved through an open search for understanding the essence of 'yoga', which is a Sanskrit term for 'union'. As a spiritual and ascetic discipline, the ultimate aim of yoga is enlightenment and emancipation. The human body transformed by yoga appears free not only from defects but also from its actual physical nature achieving a sensation of lightness and an equilibrium.²

Far from the high-traffic, quick-turnover yoga studios familiar to those of us based outside of the subcontinent, the space Shankar describes has been designed to enable the emancipation of the spirit and dissolve the separation between subject and object,³ between *us* and *them*, human and natural world. Shankar continues to visit the site, to learn how it lives within its surroundings and how it is used so as to understand the work's success. Another structure he has devised functions as a suspended canopy composed of hundreds of metal tiles, fashioned from discarded and reclaimed cooking oil cans. Perforated and painted crimson by hand, these tiles create a system, which provides cooling shade when installed in a sunny location. At night, once the sun

has receded, electric lighting visits the canopy through pinholes dotting the surface of each tile to create the complementary experience—a softly illuminated space for people to be together. The built structure embraces them, yet never blocks their access to the fresh air. Shankar named this public sculpture, completed in 2009, *Jugaad*, a Hindi term for a smart and resourceful solution to get the job done. Similar to the Spanish term *rasquache*, it refers to the idea of creating the most from the least. *Jugaad* means making something new from what was already there; it is the essence of invention.

On meeting Shankar, I was struck by how seamlessly artistic, scientific and spiritual impulses were woven together in his approach to making. His hybrid practice seeks to merge traditional knowledge, including craft practices like weaving with contemporary techniques to create new designs that positively impact their environment. In 2014, when I invited him to spend several weeks in an urban, research-focused residency I organise in Chicago, I was especially excited to work with an artist from India who was largely uninterested in the undulations of the South Asian art market or critical praise bestowed upon artists by tastemakers from the subcontinent or from the West.

Having lived in large international cities, Shankar had immediate reference points for Chicago, and during his time in residence, he re-examined his prior works seeking the potential for local grounding and relevance to this new city. At some point, he proposed a one-hundred-year project cultivating a living root bridge at the Chicago Park District, using a plant indigenous to the prairie region that could be similarly cultivated and nurtured by a community for the appreciation of a future generation. The proposition was initially met with confused amusement, some vague interest, followed by general bewilderment, then crickets.

During an evening organised for Shankar to meet a few other artists, he generously cooked the group a meal and insisted we eat in the dark to ensure closer communion with our experience of the ingredients—their taste, texture and fragrance—and with each other. Without using electric lights, I believe I did feel more closely connected to the meal, despite being confused about what I was putting into my mouth. This was not,

¹ "Cherrapunjee.com: A Dream Place", Cherrapunjee Holiday Resort, <http://www.cherrapunjee.com/living-root-bridges/>

² Relayed in email correspondence with the artist, 13 February 2018.

³ Ibid.

I believe, the intended experience, though we might ask about the possibility to guide our own (or others') attention differently.

Over time during the residency, I began to feel Shankar's frustration with our need for project time frames, meeting structures (most meetings last one hour, which felt to him too short to communicate ideas properly), and general rapid pace. I sensed that he longed to return to a place unburdened by such constraints and felt much more at ease in environments where the perpetual ticking of the clock is neither seen nor heard.

Might this absence of the clock be the measure of tradition or the meter of ancient wisdom we seem to be more and more drawn towards? Artists like Shankar have developed contemporary practices, modelled after older and fundamentally different paradigms for making. Perhaps we are all more curious about knowledge nestled deeply in the natural world and inside our own physical bodies. Yoga practice, for example, in many parts of the West is as decoupled from its ancient inception as can be imagined. It's been corporatised, commercialised, commodified into consumable pockets of time for the over-worked, over-stimulated, over-intellectualised population to experience an hour of respite, physical or mental. Despite the disconnection from traditional practice, this has widespread benefits. Humans have a deep need to feel connected to their physical selves and to the earth. Regular proximity to the earth (or floor) is critical to our wellness. The more our lifestyle alienates us from a sense of groundedness, the more we hunger for it.

Similarly, there is knowledge in our physical selves, which yearns for connection with others. This naturally happens at key moments; during sex or during childbirth, our bodies perform in a way that is deeply linked to our hominid ancestors and our future human descendants. This profound connection traverses eras and cultures, but much of how we craft our daily experiences discourages our corporeal memory of these relationships. Our interconnectedness is, unfortunately, at odds with the expansion of our virtual selves, despite what Facebook insists. The forms of contemporary life seem more and more focused on the needs of the 'individual'. They shape a singular vision of the 'self'

decoupled from its community, from its ancestors, or from a collective. And upholding this illusion of being an 'individual' carries a heavy burden. Perhaps, relying on the genius of the singular artist is also becoming too much to bear. We need alternatives, which may reveal themselves in the future form of ancient practices. The archaic notion of deep interdependence may offer respite from the shackles of being an 'individual', whose experience is the result of their labour or who has successfully pulled themselves up by their bootstraps. The fallacy of performing as an 'individual' is the ultimate handicap, perhaps relieved by the prospect of collectivity.

I'm convinced that Shankar is onto something in his attention to living root bridges as a practice of co-creation in its fullest sense. However, his own return to the forest, which involved full-time relocation to Meghalaya last year, feels akin to the pursuit of Timothy Treadwell, Grizzly Man himself, from Werner Herzog's eponymous documentary. Treadwell not only sought some form of truth by living in close and ill-advised proximity to the Alaskan grizzly bears he so admired, it seems that he also ultimately wished he could become one of them. Shankar's long-term relocation appears to manifest a similar desire. Is this withdrawal from a society too focused on individuals to one of complete collectivity, or is he an artist-ethnographer committed to documenting and disseminating indigenous practices?

Regardless of the answer, I wonder if there is another way. Can we learn from this beautiful model without becoming part of it? Consuming it? Can we admire it from a distance, living in our own worlds and still integrate the impulse into our own practices? For a long time, I only understood living root bridges through the lens of Shankar's work. He, after all, was my conduit to learning about this unknown, unknowable practice. Yet now I feel that I can continue to meditate on this practice from afar and perhaps without Shankar's work to mediate for me. I admire his attempts and his own creations, but I have my own impulse to create and cultivate with the bridges as a guide. Can I build my own attention for this model of interdependence? Is it possible for the bridges to be as much a part of my own desire for invention as they have been for the artist who helped me discover them?



Jugaad day view, 2008, Delhi, India
Photo by Sundeep Bali