

ESTHER SHALEV-GERZ

Foreword: The Trust Gap

Trust is chronotopic—it opens up other temporalities and establishes a time for concentration, perception and recognition. We understand dialogue to be a *dispositif* that is not guided a priori by moral issues or any other pre-existing judgments and that therefore creates community by according every participant equal respect, responsibility and place; for us dialogue is open, dynamic, unpredictable and always particular. Dialogue is always becoming. This is why it is important not only to work with dialogue, but also to work within, through and against it.

Excerpt from application to the Swedish Research Council for Artistic Research Funding, 2010

Despite increasing debates on participation in contemporary art, including about my own work, trust as a term and condition essential to opening and maintaining a space of interrelations remains uncommon in the art world and its rhetoric. Yet, by virtue of what art is or can be, high levels of trust are required from spectators, art historians, and collectors, as well museums and institutions and their staff. But the trust is also influenced by how the physical, aesthetic, and architectural principles of exhibition contexts inform the conditions for art within them. Because of these changing and fragile characteristics, I was curious to use this notion of the potentiality of trust as a contemporary prism through which reality may be observed. In proposing this research *through* my work I also believed that it would bring new thinking about art and its societal relations and also reveal more about what is at stake for artists and artistic practice—both fundamentally important to society and its futures. This is why I consider it significant and beneficial to reflect upon the infinite movement between trust and forms of dialogue generated by and explored through my art.

Trust has many meanings depending on the context in which it is used—be it in love, friendships, society, or indeed in culture and art. Trust is a condition where expectation affects promises and creates hopes that promises will be fulfilled; if not, disappointment and fear may arise. However, trust is also

influenced and produced by constant shifts in dialogue and changing perspectives on which promises should be fulfilled and which may be re-negotiable. Within acts of trust, time and change may affect perceptions of what is to be prioritized. In this way uncertainty and possibility become attached to the production of trust.

As an artist and a Professor of Fine Art at the Valand Academy at the University of Gothenburg I received a grant for artistic research funding from the Swedish Research Council to investigate trust and the unfolding of dialogue at the same time as two major retrospectives of my work were held: one in Jeu de Paume, Paris in 2010 and the other in 2012 at the Musée cantonal des Beaux Arts, Lausanne. To prepare for these I had to examine my own artworks, searching for what perhaps even I did not yet know about them. I set out to explore how I may come to understand more of why trust and dialogue are interrelated; how they come into being and what effects their interrelations produce. Reflection on previous works mostly occurs for me when, in parallel, I reach towards a new work amidst the traces of one that moves towards conclusion when encountered by spectators.

In such moments gaps and segues appear between existing and new works, parallel lines between works are produced or indeed collapse and a demand for connectivity may be expected, which I may also respond to with resistance, seeking instead to find discordance, ambiguity, uncertainty, and difference—traits that also influence my approach. Chronology and linearity are also challengeable in my approach. Gaps and segues both exist as catalysts from which new thoughts are made possible. Working on two surveys of my works within two years gave me a unique situation through which to produce and encounter such gaps, and thus to navigate not only new understandings of my existing works but how future works may become implicated within them, including being influenced by my commitment to this research project.

I invited three people from the arts to join me in researching these two notions—trust and the unfolding of dialogue—through my work: the film theorist Annika Wik (now independent but then at Stockholm University) who is also interested in the use of film in contemporary art, and Jason E. Bowman, an independent curator and artist based in London, who has curated two of my projects in the UK (now Program Leader for MFA: Fine Art and Head of Subject: Fine Art at Valand Academy), and Stefanie Baumann, a philosopher from Paris, who had previously worked for five years as my assistant (now based in Beirut and lecturing at the American University of Beirut).

This was the first time that I decided to project such a particularized perspective on my artworks and to try and discover even how such a precise point of view could occur. That is why I invited Annika, Stefanie, and Jason to construct this problematic together with me, working towards the possibility of us

opening new perspectives on trust and dialogue. To address such a problematic brings other problematics to the surface. The process of this research would not necessarily be easy or smooth as we would co-challenge how we were to initially distinguish encounters between notions of trust and dialogue through my works, formulate methods for how dialogue could inform our search to describe and articulate these, and naturally to reach a point where and a means by which our findings could be made public and others benefit from the research.

We would regularly meet to share our perspectives, needs, thinking, interrogations, and doubts and thus chart and map each of our speculative and emergent findings—itsself a process that formed trust and radiated from a belief in dialogue as a way to think together and expose each other to the possibilities of how knowledge may become through one and the other.

There were regular exchanges, workshops, seminars and conversations with all of us or between individual researchers. Sometimes these were closed sessions but also often public at symposia in universities and art schools, at galleries and through articles published in other catalogues etc. From discussing how to give form to the outcomes of this three-year collaboration, we decided to gather heterogeneous material in the format of a new publication. This entailed a new phase of our individual and collective work: discovering how the nature of a publication may articulate the insights and explorations each of us had constructed alongside new and existing writings by others.

Personally, at the inception of the project I spent two weeks in residency at the Institute of Quality of Government, headed by Bo Rothstein in the faculty of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg. I was intrigued that they were also researching the notion of trust but also how it may be measured. Between 2010 and 2013 I spoke on the project in the context of fifteen international conferences and seminars across Europe and North America,¹ constantly sustaining interrogations of the significance of articulating, defining, and working through the potentiality of trust and dialogue and their relevance to multiple contexts. But, also at the core of my research process between 2011 and 2012 was the opportunity to re-examine the role invitation plays in my practice, the nature of being commissioned within an institutional frame and how a work (and its work) is realized through participation. At the invitation of the Wolfsonian—Florida International University, I was able to interrogate these notions of trust and unfolding dialogue via practice with the commissioning of a new work *Describing Labor*, produced by the Wolfsonian-FIU.

One of the most important elements in my projects is the invitation to participate. The human figure arises in my work through the contributions of people and nuanced senses of detail. People as themselves with their own experiences; by what they say through their thoughts, or indeed through the

body and the slightness of its movements. There are always more than two people in my projects: a participant, a spectator, and myself. In addition there is the commissioner, the funder, the curator, plus those people involved in every strata of its production. When such multiplicity of perspectives, roles and responsibilities are involved dialogue is capable of attending to perpetual states of flux as a project moves towards realization. To a certain extent the ways those dialogues unfold depends on the state of trust involved.

During an initial residency at the Wolfsonian-FIU, I was attracted to images of workers in the artworks of a collection, including art and objects from 1885 to 1945. During my research I read Lyotard's book, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*² where he argues that in being exposed to the metamorphosis of the bodies and minds of the workers, as they were taken from the fields to the factories, Duchamp changed his way of working. I think that Duchamp was most likely exposed to representations of the worker via exhibitions and the concern of artists with their representation at that time.

I modified aspects of my usual process. With *Describing Labor*, it would be *from* an existing work of art that the notion of experience would be generated, as opposed to experience itself being the generator of a new work of art, as in my preceding projects. Usually participants are invited to contribute their experience as a central part of my work and thus trust invigorates the frame of production. I also wanted *Describing Labor* to interrogate trust in relation to the objects of art, the institutions that hold them and the people who engage with them—but for artifacts to be an initial spoor of trust, and how trust would be unfolded through the creation of dialogue from objects and artworks to people. Forty-one artworks were “invited” first, before participants. I also wanted to find traces of what the artists responsible for them might have said about these at the time of their making. The outcomes of that research material became a sound piece. Twenty-four participants related to art and its languages were invited to individually choose one artifact from the forty-one and then describe it while being filmed. In turn each participant then displaced the chosen artwork amongst other artifacts in the museum's storage annex, where it was then photographed. I produced twenty glass objects inspired by the tools depicted in the works being described: hammers, mallets, gloves, and sledgehammers.³ I also invited a group of six musicians⁴ who composed twelve music tracks inspired by the selection of the forty-one historical works.

Through video, audio, photography, and the selection of the historic artworks from the Wolfsonian-FIU and the Margulies collections, *Describing Labor* invites the present via a detour among images from the past to relate to the now rarely seen figure of those whose labor fabricated the physical world. One channel of a two-channel video displayed the camera traveling through the aisles of the museum's storage annex before cutting to the profile of a participant commenting on an image. The other channel

showed a slow un-synched, close-up shot panning across the surface of each image that had been commented upon.

The twenty-four photographs of the images of the workers displaced to the annex, along with the two-channel video, proposed a new distribution of the relationships between images and objects, representations and productions, the person that builds and the things that are built. The previously researched soundtrack, of the originating artists' thoughts on the works they had produced, was sited in the elevator between the entrance and the sixth floor of the Wolfsonian-FIU where the exhibition was installed. The twelve music tracks were accessed via headphones in the four corners of the central exhibition space. The original forty-one works were hung salon-style and faced by the glass tools.

All my work is based on the potentiality of trust. Though we rarely speak of trust in relation to art, a work of art may well be the ultimate manifestation of trust. It is as if we trust, for instance, that some inked piece of paper or painted canvas will receive us and speak truly about our world and its own. It is this space of trust that enables dialogue to unfold. Dialogue is a group of people freely reaching a place and verbally exchanging thoughts in a present and immediate way whilst listening, not only to others but also to themselves with others, then coming together and exchanging again, after having left, coming together yet again. Such gathering is never spontaneous; still, it must be proposed. *Describing Labor* takes form within this duality of chance and planning. Indeed, I invited people to a specific place, had definite aims, sought to capture and proceeded to prioritize and edit. In editing, I aspire to offer a portrait of each person, as she or he would like to be released into the world. It may be improbable, but despite that, we may trust possibility and that is part of the dialogue. In science they trust and then verify what they trusted. In art this is a significant aspect of the spectator's experience.

At the moment of this publication, *Trust and the Unfolding of Dialogue* sets another challenge for the future: how to understand the future possibilities brought by our experiences and understandings? This project has provided me with an opportunity to gain even greater insight into how my work may relate to those who encounter it and the *dispositifs* that they exercise in approaching my work, approaches that are both reflective of my own but also importantly that have provided me with new thoughts especially regarding the two paradigms that the project has investigated. I have begun to think through how the *dispositifs* responsible for the "opening up" of "spaces" that is often referenced here may offer a new proposition for future development that I am only now beginning to think of—the potentiality of a "trust gap" as relative to the societal idea of enabling speech.

With these glasses, I look at other works of art, at the history of their crafting, at the history of their being chosen to be exhibited and looked at, and how they will reflect our time in other times.

I would like to thank my three fellow researchers in this transformative project: Annika Wik, Stefanie Baumann, and Jason E. Bowman. I am especially grateful for the enthusiasm and support of Johan Oberg and Gary Wasserman. To the Wolfsonian-FIU, the participants in *Describing Labor*, and the dedicated Matthew Abess who was instrumental in the realization of this work, and of course to Valand Academy and the Swedish Research Council and to all involved for their dialogues—I offer respectful and trusting gratitude.

1. 2010:

Conference: “Esther Shalev-Gerz,” Beaux-Arts de Paris, France

Seminar: “La place du non-articulé dans les témoignages filmés des survivants du génocide juif,” in the seminar “L’histoire vue par les historiens,” EHESS, Paris, France.

Conference: “Art Contemporain: Production, Identités, Mémoires?” with Stéphanie Katz, in the seminar “Minimum 2, Les Récollections,” Paris, France.

Conference as a part of the Göteborg Art Sound Festival, Gothenburg, Sweden

Symposium: “The Power of Speech: Witness in Today’s Art,” Jeu de Paume, Paris, France

Conference: “Rencontre avec G.A. Goldshmidt, écrivain, E. Shalev-Gerz, artiste, H-C. Cousseau, directeur des Beaux-Arts de Paris” in the symposium DRANCY/BOBIGNY, Art, Ville et Mémoire, Un atelier des Beaux-Arts de Paris, sous la direction de Vincent Barré, Le CentQuatre, Paris, France

Symposium: “The State of contemporary Art in Gothenburg”, keynote speaker, Konstepidemin, Gothenburg, Sweden

Conference: “Trust and the Unfolding Dialogue”, Gerlesborg conference, Gerlesborg, Sweden, (with Stefanie Baumann).

2011:

Conference: “Mémoire et mémoriaux” in the preparatory seminar for the Competition Internationale d’Affiches sur la Shoah, Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris, France

Seminar: Keynote speaker: intervention in the research group Histcon.se annual meeting, Södertörn University, Sweden.

Conference: presentation of the project “Trust and The Unfolding Dialogue” in the Quality of Government Institute Lunch Seminar, Department of Political Science, Gothenburg University, Sweden.

Keynote address: “Trust and the Unfolding Dialogue” in the context of the symposium “SHIFT: dialogues of migration in contemporary art”, MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Canada.

Keynote address: intervention in the workshop “Contemporary Past: Moving Images as Fluid Memory”, Nida, Lithuania.

Conference: “Oeuvres dans l’espace publique – La question de la permanence”, opening of the symposium “Construire la mémoire des crimes contre l’humanité: Interventions artistiques et politiques mémorielles”, St-Gervais Genève Le Théâtre, Geneva, Switzerland.

2012:

Seminar: Esther Shalev-Gerz, lecture at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hill, Michigan, USA

Seminar: Trust and the Unfolding Dialogue, presentation of the project in the Artistic Research Seminars Spring 2012, Faculty of the Arts, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Conference: Esther Shalev-Gerz, in the symposium L’Athéisme en commun, La créativité métaphysique des sociétés modernes, Institut Francès de Barcelona and Arts Santa Mònica, Barcelona, Spain

Seminar: “Esther Shalev-Gerz and Jason E. Bowman: Shalev-Gerz’s MenschenDinge (The Human Aspect of Objects), 2004-2006”, at the Valand Art and Research Centre (v.arc), Department of Fine Art, Valand Academy, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Conference: “Der Letzte Klick/The Last Click”, presentation during the Royal Institute of Art’s Research Week, Stockholm, Sweden

Conference: Georges Didi-Huberman, “Le Partage des Emotions”, in the retrospective exhibition “Esther Shalev-Gerz,

Between Telling and Listening”, Aula du Palais de Rumine, Musée cantonal des Beaux Arts/Lausanne, Switzerland.

2013:

Symposium: Benjaminian Themes in the Work of Esther Shalev-Gerz, with Esther Shalev-Gerz, Catherine Soussloff and Ian Wallace, Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

Conference: La Description, in the symposium Le Temps Exposé, Carré d'Art, Nîmes, France.

Conference: Art Contemporain: Musées, Mémoires et Monuments, with Pascal Convert, Michal Rovner, Esther Shalev-Gerz and Raphaël Zagury-Orly, Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris, France.

Conference: Intervention in Mémoires / Matériaux: Retranscrire l'histoire dans les lieux, Formation, Enseignement, Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris, France.

Conference: Double passage à Weimar, in the symposium Weimar, Une histoire allemande, Le Louvre, Paris, France.

Seminar: Intervention in Global Imaginaries, Individual Realities, Artist Lecture, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, USA.

Conference: Représenter l'irreprésentable, Table ronde with Esther Shalev-Gerz, Georges Didi-Huberman and Sabine Lemler in La Semaine de la Mémoire, Mairie du 4^{ème}, Paris, France.

Seminar: Describing Labor, in Loss of Grounds as Common Ground, Södertörns University, Stockholm, Sweden.

Seminar: Describing Labor, Shalev-Gerz presents her latest projects in discussion with Irit Rogoff, Andrea Phillips and Jason E. Bowman, Artistic Research Seminar, Goldsmiths, University of London, UK.

Conference: Between Telling and Listening, Artistic Intervention in Public Space Between Individual and Collective Memory, in the symposium Mémoire, Conscience Historique et Participation Citoyenne, Haute Ecole de Travail Social, Hes.So, Geneva, Switzerland

² Jean-François Lyotard, *Les Transformateurs Duchamp/Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, (Leuven: Lueven University Press, 2010).

³ Crafted with the artisanal support of Jeff Mack.

⁴ Shahzad Ismaily, Colin Jacobsen, Eric Jacobsen, Mathias Kunzli, Kyle Sanna, and Alex Sopp