

Sean Snyder
**Disobedience in
Tokyo**

01/11

About five years ago I received an e-mail from a gallery in Paris. A friend was walking down the street in Amsterdam. We hadn't spoken in years. He saw my name on a poster outside an institution – I had an exhibition together with Monika Sosnowska an artist from Poland. He had no idea I was an artist - but mentioned he knew immediately the work was mine and particularly liked the two-sided projection of North Korea.

Earlier this year when a professor in Kyiv was planning a conference on Anti-Semitism I suggested screening a video by Yael Bartana. The professor that organized the conference knew who the actor was. In real life. Slawomir Sierakowski came to Kyiv and suggested to produce a guidebook for Ukraine.

Last week I asked my friend in Amsterdam to Fed Ex the guidebook we read in school after mentioned we are working on something in Kyiv. And will discuss that and a few other things over dinner in Tokyo next week when he flies in for his cousins wedding.

The editor of the journal sent a link to an art magazine.

Professionalism. Nonsense. Not to sound like that drunk bitch in the Fassbinder film always yelling at her brother with the denim jacket, but I wasn't in Tel Aviv. I wrote I was detained on the way to Tel Aviv. Nothing unprofessional – it's just a link on online. In fact, the author found a good image of an El Al plane. A Boeing 747 and think I'll take it – I mean the image. And asked a gallery assistant in London to please not have any work up during the art fair in London this fall since I stole the image – just to be fair. I think they still advertise on the back cover of the magazine but I'm not sure.

The article gave me an idea about professionalism. I realized I was being unprofessional. Incompetent as an artist. I assumed these sorts of texts go unread and good to know. Journalists write what they know isn't true, in the hope that if they keep on saying it will be true.

And it's always easy to criticize. I only do that after dinner and if I didn't like the food. But would never want to sound like a fisherman speaking about shepherds to sheep or hunters rearing cattle. That would be incompetent.

Art discourse. Nonsense. Instructional entertainment. Pedagogy. Useless.

More ventriloquists repeating the same lines from yet another French philosopher. More parrots. More nonsense.

Another subsided art critic shoving hors d'oeuvres in their mouth. Nouvelle cuisine. Half-drunk after a glass of wine – jumbling more words together – more nonsense about post-modernism and yet more trash about art and other artists. Everything they know how to do.

e-flux journal #9 — october 2009 Sean Snyder
Disobedience in Tokyo

Nonsense.



In Belarus everything looks different, or more of the same in a different way. I recently read this 'Lenin statue collapses, kills man in Belarus.' And the spelling has changed from Byelorussia to Belarus. This guy must have been thinking it was still the Soviet Union – like Lukashenko does. Maybe he should have been drinking Pepsi. As a kid I couldn't quite figure this one out. Capitalism under communism. Nonsense.

The practice of art is not confined to finality centered on questioning rather than illustrating, self-reflexive without guarantee, and, as any material practice, open to the possible consequences. And when a Ukrainian PhD cultural studies candidate was talking about translating a book by Régis Debray I realized it was time to stop making art and re-read what I read in art school. I'd never want to leave anyone waiting in the hotel because a bad theory was translated – another a mouthpiece for a politician. I e-mailed the student a text about Aby Warburg to explain a bit about the idea David Burliuk had about Japanese Futurism and the Exhibition he organized.

An Exhibition can only amount to propaganda – and topicality creates the expectation politics can be propagated through art – but art is not propaganda.

Self-Interrogation on Research-Based Art – in real life I was confused how to explain being an artist with two El Al security guards. I was referring to the notion of interdisciplinarity after unintentionally answering the series of questions somewhat differently and they noticed – about art and architecture. I suppose not convincing enough as an artist. In the airport after giving the names and telephone numbers of



two Israelis the head of El Al security he went to another room and supposedly called an architect and the curator Galit Eilat to verify I was an artist. On the flight, the El Al security guard sat in the row in front and upon landing we briefly discussed art. He had a good sense of humor.

In real life I am sometimes confused how to explain being an artist. Like that story with two El Al security guards. I was referring to the notion of interdisciplinarity after unintentionally answering a series of questions somewhat differently and they noticed – about art and architecture. I suppose not convincing enough as an artist. In the airport after giving the names and telephone numbers of two Israelis the head of El Al security he went to another room and supposedly called an architect and the curator Galit Eilat to verify I was an artist. On the flight, the El Al security guard sat in the row in front and upon landing we briefly discussed art. He had a good sense of humor. Sort of reminded me of the old joke ‘Why do you tell me you are going to Cracow so I’ll believe you are going to Lvov, when you are really going to Cracow.’

Hijacking – nonsense. As a result of writing the text I rebooked my flight. Austrian Airlines was printed on the e-ticket. I ended up on Ukrainian Airlines. The ticket for the following

03/11

day had ANA written on it and I got on Austrian Airlines. I was just trying to get home to Tokyo from Kyiv but flew to Vienna to give a lecture. A number of associations came to mind – Academy, Asperger, Esperanto, Freud, and the Secession.

Following a lecture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, after being invited by Tom Holert based on the text Disobedience in Byelorussia: Self-Interrogation on “Research-Based Art” in the journal, I considered the series of questions posed in an open letter criticizing the way education and knowledge are commodified, industrialized, economized and subjected to free trade mentioned in his proposal for Art in the Knowledge-based Polis and the relation between knowledge production linked to the ideologies and practices of neoliberal educational policies.

The points of interpellation were unclear. Similar to an artwork I produced using a Soviet image manipulation technique I found in the archive of a cinema magazine, re-photographed, cropped, digitally printed, and framed. As it turned out, the same week of the lecture had I considered going to Luxemburg for the opening of an Austrian artist and researcher from Vienna and was trying to figure out which institution to visit – the school or the museum. But decided to



04/11





06/11



go back to school.

After the lecture in art school I went to see Pawel Althammer's exhibition at the Secession. I thought it was the best exhibition I've ever seen. But there really was no exhibition – just a passage right through the building. And thought what the hell am I thinking? Which gave me something think about.

A PhD program in art is not propaganda, but analysis involving trial, error, and the occasional failure. Moreover involves collaborations and exchanges with other disciplines and art can be seen as a frame. A methodology could only be another fraudulent prescription – another symptom. In this case, I didn't know whether I should have been giving a lecture or enroll in the program. I had to re-read Althusser to try and figure this one out and nearly ripped up the pages, but just put the book on the shelf and looked at the screen.

The reason I mentioned art school is like the art world is because of one video – a video filmed in Frankfurt Airport while in art school that I showed in Luxemburg. I set up a camera on a tripod and filmed whoever walked through the door. For 6 hours straight and would just change the cassette every hour. At the end I selected the most consistent flow of passengers and just had to watch for one hour to decide and never looked at the video again. No editing. Today this sort of activity wouldn't be allowed – at least not without special permission. Airport security might think you were a plotting a terrorist attack. At the time one security guard asked if I had permission – I hesitated and said yes. He didn't ask for any documents and just kept walking.

In the exhibition I also left behind a document. With a text in Luxembourgish for the public to take away. With a stop sign in Arabic.

Today in Belarus Lukashenko is not mourning the death of the same zombie as others have been recently. The inventor of the moonwalk that once caught his hair on fire making a TV commercial for Pepsi died. Again. I thought he was dead already – as a kid – on MTV. Worst of it is now you have to see his parents on TV. And they even look a bit like that Austrian pervert that locked his daughter in the basement. Josef Fritzl.

In 1986 I was listening to Radio Moscow. But also bought Psycho Candy. Feedback. The Jesus and Mary Chain. And know the difference.

The second university I attended I went to the Unification Church after reading an ad in a newspaper. A free trip to Russia – it was 1991 and no longer the Soviet Union. I went to the Church not because I was insane, but bored. But it almost made me insane - I had to sit in a room and watch a video about what they do and then afterwards talk to some girl that who devotedly

mentioned she graduated from the same university. So I left the church. And the university. And the country. But kept the book.

Qaddafi. Gaddafi. Colonel Qaddafi. Whatever. Seems he just set up a tent in New York the other day. I could never figure out the spelling and always translated differently. A demented mimetician. In reality. This tyrant sometimes even dresses up like the zombie that invented the moonwalk. Real appropriation. He even wrote this ridiculous book - or at least says he did on the cover. 'Fun with dictatorship.' A real comedian. He even ordered to have an airplane blown up in the 1980s. But now he's making friends with everyone again - and this year he even received a visitor from Ukraine.

08/11



The headlines linked to the news of an art magazine, September 11, 2009
Austrian Family Seeks Return of Vermeer Sold to Hitler
Sweden Temporarily Removes Swastika Paintings from Stockholm Museum
Tel Aviv Gallery Removes 'Terrorist Madonnas'

World War II and the Middle Ages
In another art school last year I researched in the physical archives of an online archive assisted by a German student from a curatorial studies program and found a series of publications with the shredded documents left behind after the takeover of the American Embassy during the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The 'revolutionaries' put the documents back together and just printed the books to expose what was going on inside. Even the Israelis were annoyed with what they were up to in there.

One of the 'revolutionaries' apparently involved hasn't kept up his blog recently. It said before that he would spend 15 minutes a day writing to his friends. Seems he was lying or simply busy with other things.

While preparing the talk for Vienna I thought

e-flux journal #9 — october 2009 Sean Snyder
Disobedience in Tokyo

about two projects I presented in Luxemburg in a garage while in art school and one publication I produced with the Secession. Because there was one joke I couldn't quite explain to the Austrian artist last time we met. I couldn't explain the logic. It had to do with research on Japanese architecture and how I was able to convince a government agency in Japan that I am an expert in architecture based on a project published with the Secession – an artist organization. The research project was a plan for the reconstruction of Skopje following an earthquake in 1963 involving a collaborative effort between architects. Organized by the United Nations the competition was won by a group of Japanese architects and engineers based on an unrealized plan for Tokyo Bay. I considered the project a metaphor for 9-11. The World Trade Center was designed by the Japanese architect Minoru Yamasaki. The project initially started as a commission by the Netherlands Architecture Institute to document the post facilities of train stations in Holland. After researching in the archives at the NAI I located a publication with the blueprints of a rail station in Macedonia and went to research.

In Japan Heisei 24. In North Korea it's Juche 98. It's 2009 on my computer screen.

I recently digitized some photocopies of the first book I ever found about North Korea in the Bibliothèque Publique d'information in the Centre Pompidou I was reading while in art school. The first time I had ever seen images of

North Korea. But could only make photocopies. I started listening to shortwave radio again. The station used to be called Radio Pyongyang. They recently changed the name to the Voice of Korea.

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09/11



10/11



Sean Snyder is an artist who lives in Kyiv and Tokyo. He is represented by Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; Lisson Gallery, London; and Galerie Neu, Berlin.

11/11

e-flux journal #9 — october 2009 Sean Snyder
Disobedience in Tokyo