

By an invisible hand

group show | May 20 to July 25, 2015
opening on Sunday May 17, 2015 | 2 – 6.55 p.m.

Annie Vigier et Franck Apertet (les gens d'Uterpan)
Stéphane Barbier Bouvet
Patrick Bouchain
Anne Lacaton et Jean Philippe Vassal
Dominique Mathieu
Nils Holger Moormann
Matthieu Saladin
Lois Weinberger

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Footnotes by an invisible hand

by Émile Ouroumov

The philosopher Adam Smith occupies a privileged place in the hall of fame of economic liberalism, thanks mainly to his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776). One phrase Smith uses somewhat incidentally in this book has become the banner of ultra-liberal thinking, having been misinterpreted. By using the expression “an invisible hand”, the author refers to an unconscious mechanism which, despite diverging individual interests, contributes to the prosperity of a particular nation:

By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, [the individual] intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. [...] By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.

Many have understood this metaphor to be a principle of quasi-spiritual order. It is held to allow self-regulation of trade, which coordinates and transcends private interest and leads to social harmony without requiring the interference of moral principles. Non-regulated capitalism is thus held to be a natural and infallible economic form, because even when it starts to get out of control, thanks to this “invisible hand” its fundamental principles are believed to spontaneously adjust the market for the common good. According to the disciples of this religion with no apocalypse, the innate intelligence of the markets makes it possible to overcome crises and to support limitless growth, since it follows a form of incorruptible logic whose sole parameter is to foster the development of those markets, irrespective of other considerations.

It is interesting to draw a comparison between global capitalism and the system within which recent art is evolving: the latter has its own economy of objects and people, of private and public investors, and of quantifiable growth parameters. The benefits it provides can be financial (by selling artworks) and political (by conveying a particular message). The world's cultural capitals capitalise on this precious artistic added value, which confirms their importance in the context of symbolic and monetary exchanges; as in any sector with a high

return on investment, there is a shift from amateurism and individual initiative towards professionalism and skilled management. Via a form of "affective capitalism", which is intensely deregulated and encourages employment insecurity, the so-called "creative" sphere has even styled itself as an example of the negation of hard-won social gains, with a view to unrestrainedly multiplying the number of people involved and the number of objects produced. And yet the field of ideas sits less than comfortably alongside valuation on the Stock Exchange, and even the "invisible hand" of the artist, who transubstantiates an object into a work, is at pains to adapt to industrial planning and production methods.

This state of conflict has given rise to critical approaches and strategic retreats designed to find a way out of a domain cluttered with *objects without ideas*, preferring instead *ideas without objects*. If the notion of the "invisible hand" applies to the present exhibition, it's in reverse: it involves a form of productive aberration. It is no longer a case of supernatural, omniscient intervention, but instead a question of deliberate, assertive economy of means. This "hand" makes gestures that are artistic and civic in equal measure, using a non-verbal idiom that expresses a desire for restraint, autonomy, disobedience, and refusal. One might even speak of a *grève des objets*, not only in the sense of "objects on strike", but also in the sense of a "beach" (also "grève") upon which the flotsam of indices, utterances and residues of acted-out artworks washes up, speculating on the requirements and conditions of their materiality.

Réduction d'activité (2015), by the artist, musician and researcher Matthieu Saladin, takes us to the heart of the matter before we even enter the exhibition space, by imposing its own conditions on how it is accessed. The protocol of the work modifies the usual opening schedule as the exhibition progresses, making the gallery close five minutes earlier each successive day. At the end of the exhibition, the space will close in mid-afternoon instead of in the evening. The way the artwork functions produces reality instead of a metaphor: over the entire period, it generates over 4,000 minutes of free time. Through an applied critique of the economic relationships between art and society, it blithely expends the habitually regulated time-capital by making it available for the gallery team and visitors to use, for any activity or idle pursuit that might contribute to their professional or personal fulfilment.

Once we have experienced these unoccupied moments and entered the interior, we find ourselves in a "prepared" space, in the sense that it contains the residue of *Week-End*, the previous exhibition at the gallery. This was a solo show by Stéphane Barbier-Bouvet, an artist working at the crossroads of art and design, who presented a number of works: luminous panels reduced to their simplest form and relieved of their function—namely to serve a society of information and consumerism; picnic tables whose standardised appearance is counterbalanced by the vernacular poetry of the graffiti all over them; and bin bags in vivid colours completing the transitory atmosphere of the situation created by the artist. Continuing on logically from the artist's gesture requires a form of "release"; the re-presentation of this idle community of objects in a residual state only serves to reinforce its uncertain status.

From these pale reflections, we move on to the assertion of absence. *Il Giornale di Milano*, a fictional newspaper that serves to present the participation of the producer of designer furniture Nils Holger Moormann at the Milan Furniture Fair in 2008, highlights the absence of anything new at his booth: *Nothing new at Moormann's!* The maker favours a semi-industrial working method in cooperation with local manufacturers, emphasizing and critically re-examining simple forms

and traditional know-how. Communicating about “nothing” is faithful to the principles of deceleration dear to Moormann, who can only break with the process of constant novelty that prevails in art and design fairs.

Similarly, the work of architects Lacaton & Vassal (Anne Lacaton & Jean-Philippe Vassal) runs counter to the imposing, rootless projects typical of international architecture. In 1996, on the occasion of a series of commissions aiming to “improve” several squares in Bordeaux, the pair studied the existing layout of the Place Léon Aucoc, which turned out to be harmonious, beautiful and authentic. Based on this observation, rather than attempting to be fashionable, the architects decided to intervene in a respectful, invisible way, by supporting and asserting the square's existing features: treating the trees, cleaning more frequently, replacing the gravel, and slightly altering the traffic flow.

Still in the field of architecture, Patrick Bouchain is interested in the public utility of construction projects and focuses on the central place occupied by humans in any building. His proposal for the exhibition takes the form of a series of small posters reminiscent of the strips stuck obliquely across theatre or election campaign posters. The words printed on them share views on a form of architecture that resonates with the social sphere, and is politically committed and aware of the notion of public wellbeing. Their translation in Arabic, the language of many immigrants in France, here creates a concrete local anchoring point, running counter to the use of impersonal English/French bilingualism as a peripheral effect of globalisation. The presence in the exhibition of two architect's models made for travelling shows testifies to the way his thinking manifests itself in concrete form. Clear and informative, they demonstrate a form of architecture executed with great economy of means, using simple materials (timber frames and marquee canvas) and attentive to existing types of craftsmanship.

The same eagerness to avoid contributing to the vocabulary of exaggerated and cumbersome gestures can be seen in the work of Dominique Mathieu, this time in the field of design. He focuses on re-using inexpensive and often upcycled objects in an intuitive way. For *La Chose* (2015), he wants to find a new use for a carefully chosen piece of waste from a building site, transforming “the thing” in question, a less than attractive lump of concrete, into a shelf for his own use. The photographs that document the transformation point to the “designer's” aspiration to make it possible for anyone to do the same, inviting visitors to become “*objecteurs de croissance*” (“growth objectors”) themselves.

Continuing with the question of what is undesirable in contemporary society, the work of Lois Weinberger acts as an interface between nature and sculpture, life and art, by using subtly anarchic means. His work reflects his interest in the simplicity of ruderal plants: plants that grow spontaneously in brownfield sites and among roadside rubble, often near areas of human habitation. The works presented here provide an insight into the various aspects of his approach, for example *Wild Cube* (1991/2015), a cage made of steel rods providing a protective home for spontaneous vegetation whose growth keeps out all human intervention, and *Garden* (1997), a tiny indoor garden where newspapers act as a planting medium. In *Untitled* (2009-), akin to the work of a naturalist, he tries to “register” the snails in his garden, while *Area External* (1996) is the image of a human figure caught up between wild and domesticated nature.

les gens d'Uterpan (Annie Vigier and Franck Apertet), a pair whose work redefines the field of choreography by analysing its conventions and the way it resonates with the visual arts, offer a reactivation of *Méditation* (2013), a piece that introduces an introspective pause in the continuity of the aesthetic experience. The work involves meditating in an exhibition space that is open to the public, the participants being visitors who have been informed of the protocol

of the work (accompanied by the choreographers at the vernissage, or by the gallerist at certain times during the exhibition). The apparent passiveness and the absence of gestures belie an inner experience, where the visitors-cum-performers discreetly appropriate the time and space of the gallery for their personal use, thus embodying the issues raised by the exhibition.

** Emile Ouroumov (b. 1979, Bulgaria)*

He has assisted the curators Pierre Bal-Blanc (Centre d'art contemporain de Brétigny, Greater Paris, 2011-12), Hans Ulrich Obrist (Serpentine Gallery, 2009-10) and Odile Burlaux (Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2009) and has also gained experience as a gallery assistant at gb agency in Paris (2010) and conservation department / public programmes assistant at MAMCO (Geneva, 2011-12), followed by residencies in Zurich, Geneva and São Paulo.

His most recent project "The Galápagos Principle" (Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2013).

His current research and prospective interests include the conflicting porosity between the roles of the curator and the artist, unstable formats of curating, the relationship between language and art and the paratext accompanying contemporary art exhibitions such as critical writing and press releases.

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Hours of the gallery | protocol " Réduction d'activité " | Matthieu Saladin

*** Wednesday to Saturday**

May 17 2 to 6.55 p.m., May 20, 2 - 6.50 p.m., May 21, 2 – 6.45 p.m., May 22, 2 – 6.40 p.m., May 23, 2 – 6.35 p.m., May 27, 2 – 6.30 p.m., May 28, 2 – 6.25 p.m., May 29, 2 – 6.20 p.m., May 30, 11 a.m. – 6.15 p.m., June 03, 2 – 6.10 p.m., June 04, 2 – 6.05 p.m., June 05, 2 – 6.00 p.m., June 06, 11 a.m. – 5.55 p.m., June 10, 2 – 5.50 p.m., June 11, 2 – 5.45 p.m., June 12, 2 – 5.40 p.m., June 13, 11 a.m. – 5.35 p.m., June 17, 2 – 5.30 p.m., June 18, 2 – 5.25 p.m., June 19, 2 – 5.20 p.m., June 20, 11 a.m. – 5.15 p.m., June 24, 2 – 5.10 p.m., June 25, 2 – 5.05 p.m., June 26, 2 – 5.00 p.m., June 27, 11 a.m. – 4.55 p.m., July 01, 2 – 4.50 p.m., July 02, 2 – 4.45 p.m., July 03, 2 – 4.40 p.m., July 04, 11 a.m. – 4.35 p.m., July 08, 2 – 4.30 p.m., July 09, 2 – 4.25 p.m., July 10, 2 – 4.20 p.m., July 11, 2 – 4.15 p.m., July 15, 2 – 4.10 p.m., July 16, 2 – 4.05 p.m., July 17, 2 – 4.00 p.m., July 18, 11 a.m. – 3.55 p.m., July 22, 2 – 3.50 p.m., July 23, 2 – 3.45 p.m., July 24, 2 – 3.40 p.m., July 25, 11 a.m. – 3.35 p.m.

Activation "Meditation"

Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet (les gens d'Uterpan)

readings performed by the gallerist

Wednesday to Friday | 2 – 3 p.m.

Saturday | 11 - 12 a

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*News hours of the gallery
during the exhibition
protocol " Réduction d'activité "
Matthieu Saladin

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