dj readies

Intimate Bureaucracies

Intimate Bureaucracies

Intimate Bureaucracies

A Manifesto

dj readies

punctum books ✶ brooklyn, ny

INTIMATE BUREAUCRACIES: A MANIFESTO

© Craig J. Saper (dj readies), 2012.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommerical-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit: http://creativecommons.org/licenses /by-nc-nd/3.0, or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

First published in 2012 by
punctum books
Brooklyn, New York

In collaboration with:

AK Press Tactical Media, Baltimore / Oakland / Edinburgh
The AK Press Tactical Media Project makes short, timely political interventions freely available in download and zine form (http://www.revolution bythebook.akpress.org/ak-tactical-media/).

Minor Compositions, Wivenhoe / Brooklyn / Port Watson
Minor Compositions is a series of interventions & provocations drawing from autonomous politics, avant-garde aesthetics, and the revolutions of everyday life (http://www.minorcompositions. info/).

punctum books is dedicated to radically creative modes of intellectual inquiry and writing across a whimsical para-humanities assemblage. This is a space for the imp-orphans of thought and pen, an ale-serving church for little vagabonds (http:// punctumbooks.com).

ISBN-13: 978-0615612034

Facing-page drawing by Heather Masciandaro.

Intimate Bureaucracies: A Manifesto

dj readies

Participatory decentralization, a mantra of art and political networks, expresses a peculiarly intimate bureaucratic form. These forms of organization represent a paradoxical mix of artisanal production, mass-distribution techniques, and a belief in the democratizing potential of electronic and mechanical reproduction techniques. Borrowing from mass-culture image banks, these intimate bureaucracies play on forms of publicity common in societies of spectacles and public relations. Intimate bureaucracies have no demands, no singular ideology, nor righteous path.

Intimate bureaucracies monitor the pulse of the society of the spectacle and the corporatized bureaucracies: economics, as in Big Business; culture, as in Museums and Art Markets; mass media, as in

Studio Systems and Telecommunication Networks; and politics, as in Big Government. Rather than simply mounting a campaign against big conglomerations of business, government, and culture, these intimate bureaucracies and their works use the forms of corporate bureaucracies for intimate ends. Rather than reach the lowest common denominator, they seek to construct what those in the business world would call niche marketing to specific, narrowly defined demographics. Ironically, the model these artists developed has now become the new mantra of businesses interested in utilizing the World Wide Web and the Internet, as these technologies allow for very specific niche marketing. Intimate bureaucracies emulate, and resist, the very systems of the new business model used in Internet marketing. George Maciunas's FluxHouse project functioned like a DIY development corporation, but with cooperative and social capitalists motivations. Maciunas referred to it as entrepreneurial communism, but now the phrase social entrepreneurs describes similar projects like the Kiva or Kickstarter projects.

The apparent oxymoron, intimate bureaucracies, is a set of strategically subversive maneuvers and also the very basis for the new productive mythology surrounding the World Wide Web. Electronic networks combine a bureaucracy with its codes, passwords, links, and so on with niche marketing, intimate personal contacts, and the like, creating a hybrid situation or performance. It's a mix of cold impersonal systems and intimate social connections; it scales up whispering down the lane games. The earlier projects of Anna Freud Banana, Guy Bleus (whose canceling stamps appear in this manifesto), Randall Packer, Geof Huth, and many others all used the trappings of bureaucracies, like canceling stamps,

systems of organizing information, and alternative publication networks, to create similar hybrid performances. The Madison, Wisconsin artists mIEKAL aND & Lyx Ish even started a Dreamtime Village (www.dreamtimevillage.org). It is not merely business or governmental performance masquerading as performance art. It is not even performance art mocking business and government procedures, but the emergence of an alternative politics.

Early in his career, Roland Barthes used the image of a car trip through history to describe how mythology works. When a driver looks out of a car's windshield, she sees the landscape as full and present, and, at the same time, she sees the windshield. Myths function as windows framing and mediating our view of the world around us. The slightest change in focus allows the driver to notice the window. A broken window makes the myth too obvious, and we seek new myths. To focus only on the window would cause the car to crash. Barthes suggests a third option besides naïveté or cynical nihilism. Focusing on window and view separately goes against myth's dynamic of both window and scenery taken in together. Barthes explains that when he counters this dynamic, he morphs from a reader to that of mythologist. The mythologist takes advantage of the vacillation between noticing the windowpane and seeing the landscape to create what he calls an artificial mythology. This counter-myth of "naïveté looked at" neither replaces the window nor transcends it to direct access (*Mythologies*, 136). It simply changes the driver's focus.

Barthes does not tell us much more about this phrase, nor does he allude to it ever again in his other works throughout his career. From this little detail, this little thrown-away gem—or as the Spanish refer to a diamond in a lemon, a *sapates*—springs the

possibility of a methodology for the study of cultural and media invention.

That Barthes chose a drive in a car as the model for ideology seems particularly fitting for citizens of the United States because the American Dream depends so much on the mobility of the family car, the destruction of downtown city neighborhoods, and the disruption of walkable communities. Even e-mail and the Internet have failed to dent the car's hold. Bicycles, important means of transportation in many economies remain a recreational vehicle or, in congested urban areas, a way for speedy messengers to get around the car traffic. These daring bike-messengers are the exception that proves the rule: all of our cultural myths seem to circulate around the car, and quite literally. The car is not just as an apt metaphor for mythologies; it is the epitome of American mythologies. The familiarity of the car makes it not only Barthes's vehicle for the metaphor to describe the interactions of myth, artificial myth, and material history, but also an image used in popular culture to describe progress through history.

Intimate bureaucracies may exist on a different scale than the large systems that determine ideologies. One view of the conflict involving the Occupy Wall Street movement (OWS) might suggest a conflict against the large-ideological fossil fuel-burning car (and the socio-political industry) as well as the rapid transport system's corollaries in the instant flows of capital among investment banks. The endless rapid cartel system (pun intended) involves a series of objectionable results, including the flows of capital away from slowly declining red-lined areas.

In response to the OWS protests, the society of the instant produces 24/7 news flashes, rapid summaries and counter-arguments, all clamoring for an instantly available definitive set of "demands" or a

"program." The system does not merely demand the attention of the viewers as in the society of the spectacle, but now also demands instant response. OWS's most profound politics may have less to do with the injustices of the current tax codes, wealth disparity, or even, economic collapse, and more to do with its systems and practices of organization and communication.

My book *Networked Art* uses the neologism 'sociopoetic' to describe how artists performed, manipulated, and scored (as in musical scores) social situations. These social situations function as part of an artwork. The networking over, and on, boundaries (national, geographic, political, technological, organizational, cultural, and aesthetic) became, in these works, a canvas. In Randall Packer's "United States Department of Art & Technology," his invented department, complete with signage, photographs of a governmental building with the department's name engraved in stone over the doors, logos, memos, and other trappings of the USDA&T (www.usdat.us), opens on to many other questions. Who owns the right to use the term United States? Should the United States have a cabinet-level department that examines the key component (technology) of our future? How would such a department function? Who determines what departments we need? Why not have a USDA&T? What other departments do we need? Perhaps a US Department of Intimate Bureaucracies (USDIB)?

The term sociopoetic describes the use of social situations or social networks as a canvas. The term sociopoetic does not define my methodology. Instead, the term describes the works studied here. My theoretical approach studies how situations function poetically (or sociopoetically). Although I do present contextual information (the history, the participants,

the politics, and the like) as entangled in the artwork, my focus remains on how these works manipulate and score situations. In many of the artworks I have studied previously, the artists created "intimate bureaucracies" that "sought to project intimacy onto otherwise impersonal systems" (*Networked Art*, 24). One might argue that this project seeks to do the same for social action theory. By highlighting the existing aesthetic relationships as well as performance settings, distribution systems, measurement machinery, or the social apparatus, my project does not demythologize, but displaces, the frame to focus on the sociopoetic dimension. Scholars usually describe that dimension as a mechanism of social control and manipulation. Whether one agrees or disagrees with the justification or results of that social apparatus, it is commonly considered only in social scientific terms rather than as a poetic and artistic practice or a social poetry. Bureaucracy, as a mode of governmental or corporate organization, depends on officials rather than elected representatives or charismatic leaders. It usually connotes a cold, faceless, and excessively complicated system of administration. It epitomizes the distance between a governing body's procedures and the needs and desires of its citizens, subjects, or customers. Of course, much of the term's descriptive power depends on its connotations rather than on its specific meaning and definitions. It also suggests a large-scale mechanism familiar to anyone who has lived through modernity in the twentieth century. In tragic situations, it has Kafkaesque overtones and the markings of fascism—what Hannah Arendt called the "banality of evil." In happier situations, it appears in the administration of postal systems, the protocols of the Internet, and even IKEA's distribution systems. It never finds itself describing radical forms of social organization.

Intimacy, the close familiarity of friendship or love, by definition depends on a small-scale system of communication. Its warmth, face-to-face contact, and fleeting impact has often been the subject of art and literature. It usually appears in administration situations as either an insincere ornamentation of a political campaign ("pressing the flesh" or kissing babies) or as inappropriate office behavior (affairs, gossip, etc.), but rarely as the center of a political system. The "small is beautiful" movement did suggest the possibility of an intimacy in politics, but did not provide a blueprint for how to scale the system to the size of a government.

The pseudonymously written *bolo'bolo* (1983), published by Semiotext(e) in their conspiratorial-sounding Foreign Agents series, describes the practical steps toward a utopian international social system. The author known only as "p.m." (at least before post-publication interviews revealed the author's identity) explains how small groups gathering outside the functions of an economy will form the foundation of this new social system. Instead of impersonal production and consumption, in which people's work, for an abstract economy, defines the social system, people join together only in groups of common enthusiasms. No group, or "bolo," forces anyone to stay, and individuals move from group to group depending on their current enthusiasm. The examples of common enthusiasms listed by p.m. include a very wide, and endlessly elastic, range of interests: garli-bolo, blue-bolo, coca-bolo, no-bolo, retro-bolo, les-bolo, etc.

The bolo depends on limiting social organizations to groups of between five hundred and one thousand persons so that they do not become dependent on higher authorities. In traditional governments or other organizations, a separate larger administrative group is

a "structurally necessitated bureaucracy." In that governing system, any administrative and governing body probably works to assure the citizens that they can meet the specific group's needs. Functioning governments seeks to serve the needs of its citizens. The bolos seek to avoid these well-meaning "control organs" that become "susceptible to corruption," and require constant vigilance and work for an abstract labor market. p.m. also argues that bolos do not use "the large communes of the 1970s" as models. Instead, bolos function as "civil member organizations" in which you can "bring your wealth in with you" and "take it out with you when you leave. They are not communes" (*bolo'bolo*, 85).

For the purposes of this manifesto, the current role of technology in society suggests that intimate networks may have unwittingly initiated a reconfiguration of sociopolitical systems that looks much like a bolo. Although p.m. insists that bolo'bolo will "not be an electronic civilization" because "computers are typical for centralized, depersonalized systems," s/he goes on to explain that "the existing material and hardware could also be used by the bolos for certain purposes" because "networks are energy- efficient and permit a better horizontal contact between users than other media" (*bolo'bolo*, 124). Written before the implications of online communication were at all apparent, p.m. thinks of a network "connected with regional or planetary processors or data-banks" (*bolo'bolo*, 123). Once the transportation system slows and centralized

systems of control fail, electronic networks will allow for communication to continue. In a description that could easily apply to social media, p.m. explains the impact of this type of network:

> Such a network of horizontal communication could be an ideal complement to self-sufficiency. Independence doesn't have to become synonymous with isolation. For the bolos there's little risk of becoming dependent upon technology and specialists—they can always fall back on their own expertise and personal contacts. (Without bolos and relative autarky, computer technology is just a means of control by the centralized machine.) (*bolo'bolo*, 125)

These radical systems already exist in OWS and in online communities and interest groups; and, just as p.m. suspected, they would begin without regard to economics, but rather in terms of shared enthusiasms. The impact, though, transcends an art project or a collective activity. It has become the foundation of much more broad platforms for cultural invention and social action.

Intimate bureaucracies, and other distributed weaves of networks online, unwittingly move toward appreciating even the most powerful government's lack of power as a threat, rather than as a revolutionary's ultimate dream-come-true. Lack of power (or power to attack only), rather than the ability to defend, preserve, and protect, may define contemporary culture's greatest threat. If, as the Fascists say, the trains always ran on time in Mussolini's Italy, then, one might answer, they ran only for the Fascists. In the contemporary version of that tautology, the escape plans and contingencies

worked in the flooding of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina, for example, but only for those that escaped. Intimate networks respond by setting up online networks, and even the most frivolous enthusiasms, like knitting or craft sites, prepare the participants.

Media studies, as a discipline, seeks to demonstrate how media forms and messages position, manipulate, and delude subjects. The networked sociopoetic experiments do not celebrate this absence as some kind of resistance; rather, they suggest an alternative to exposés, de-mythologies, and revelations. Those alternatives do not replace readings that find effaced politics lurking behind simple presentations, but focus instead on incompetence masquerading as power and authority, rather than on ideological power masquerading as entertainment, culture, and media. Intimate networks offer connectedness and shared responsibility in the face of a lack of power. They often explicitly discuss their collective efforts as "underground" alternatives to corporate power.

The aesthetics of connectedness, the focus on concrete enthusiasms, the links and movement among the enthusiasts' groups, and the willing manipulation of desires (not for productive economic ends) make the networked art experiments into a model for, and demonstration of, cultural invention and social action. The aesthetics, or sociopoetics, of tribe-making activities has subtle and very specific qualities. Looking only at the quantitative, or explicit, will miss appreciating the torque, frisson, and mood of those links. Although the databases of these hyper-linked tribal forms are limited and relatively small, and the actual links usually number less than one thousand at any given time, the cognitive map—the imagined—unfolds as aninfinity of possibilities. Preparing the mind for that type of imagination is an ongoing

project.

Fluxus (www.fluxus.org), now included as a canonical movement in art history, was intended first as the name of a publication, and later as a social experiment. The most famous of those who participated in Fluxus projects, events, and publications were John Lennon and Yoko Ono, but the core members, like Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) and the group's founder, George Maciunas (1931-1978), possessed an interest in social systems that was extremely influential in contemporary arts. Outside of museums, galleries, art history, and among contemporary experimental artists and poets, Fluxus is little known to scholars of political, cultural, and social action. Certainly, compared to the term Happenings or the seemingly more politically engaged Yippies, Fluxus and Maciunas have remained a footnote as a social program.

Fluxus's goal was to purge the art world of authors and creative geniuses. Like many of the contributions to assembling magazines, the works became models for alternative forms of social organization. Indeed, as Estera Milman explains, "Fluxus work (objects, paperworks, publications, festivals, and performances) and the movement's social structures became congruent and interchangeable" (Milman 12). George Maciunas's manifesto for Fluxus explains this sociopoetic practice:

> Fluxus [...] forgoes distinction between art and non-art forgoes artist's indispensability, exclusiveness, individuality, ambition, . . . (Maciunas, "Manifesto," n.p.)

The Fluxus project combined a sometimes parodic emulation of the Bauhaus model, with the production of "impersonal" conceptual games and puzzles,

concrete poetry, along with an interest in situations, experimental culture, and an attack on "commodity value" in art. These concerns and the mixing of these tendencies appeared in a number of Fluxus assemblings and periodicals. While Vaudeville, Cage, and Duchamp have secured prominent places in scholarship on art and mass culture, Spike Jones still remains a somewhat marginal figure. Yet, his "Musical Depreciation Revue" offers a whole array of useful jokes, gags, puns, spoonerisms, and the like.

The overlap of Fluxus art and social programs began in their event scores. Fluxus event scores and performance instructions have a didactic structural grammar; they seem to be parodies of social-scientific experiments simply because they reduce theatricality to a set of instructions. Using the trappings of a social experiment suggests a way to further displace the interpretation of Fluxus as an art movement. Building and interacting with their work, rather than passively appreciating it as a finished product, changes interpretation into a generative project. The start of that sort of interpretation begins with a new concept: intimate bureaucracy.

One sees an important allusion to intimate bureaucracies in Dick Higgins's mail-art collaboration in 1989 with Robert Rehfeldt, an East German artist. Higgins, a composer who studied with Henry Cowell and John Cage, produced a series of Fluxus scores and events starting in the early 1960s. He became an

influential publisher, poet, art historian of visual poetry, essayist and theorist, and an artist. The swath of connections from the one collaboration with Rehfeldt includes the authenticating rubber-stamp of a Polish Communist Party official in charge of approving, censoring, or rejecting art events as well as Higgins's identical stamp. Higgins's notes and correspondence with Rehfeldt would illuminate one Party official's continuing rejection of mail-art events and exhibitions in Poland; the map would also include plans for duplicating and distributing the authenticating stamp to Polish mail-artists, who, in turn, approved exhibitions.

The stamps also connect to the odd obsessive paranoia about mail-art in the Eastern Block nations, as evidenced by East Germany's Stasi, who had an enormous mail-art collection from their investigations and confiscations. The mapping of the mail-art event included Higgins's descriptions of how he also subscribed to gay porn magazines and Trotskyist newspapers, both prohibited by the Communist Party, using the name and address of the Party censor, whose authenticating stamp they had duplicated. The narrative of the map would also include the uncharacteristically formal and typed letter from Rehfeldt to Higgins saying that "Mr. Higgins had performed an inappropriate act" by using the fraudulent stamp to apparently approve a whole series of mail-art events and exhibitions in Poland. Next to the formal letter, another unsigned, handwritten note sent to Higgins from East Germany simply says, "Keep it up!" The mail-art event also connects to the issues of the Commonpress assembling (so named because of the common effort of the contributors) that were produced in Poland and assembled by Pawel Petasz, who explained that the Polish censors would stamp the back of each and every proof page of a publication

with an official mark of approval or rejection. Rubber stamp art from around the world was the focus of all the issues produced in Poland.

The branching nodes of the Rehfeldt-Higgins map would also include Higgins's writings on the post-cognitive mode of research that appears in his books and essays on intermedia as well as his writings on mail-art. Other branches of the map would include Ben Vautier's "Postman's Choice" and other Fluxus mail-art. Conceptually, the Higgins-Rehfeldt mail-art event would also link to descriptions and examples of unwanted direct-mail and spam email, even though the term did not appear until the 1990s. One could imagine links to theories of paranoia, and various artistic uses in, for example, the Surrealists' "paranoiac criticism." Other nodes would include Ray Johnson's use of paranoid systems in his mail-art and on-sendings (discussed below) as well as the secondary literature on hysterical and paranoid modernism. This example of a swath of networked nodes illustrates the value of the mapping of ideas, objects, events, people, systems, and locations in terms of an intimate bureaucracy. Just exhibiting the stamp would not do justice to the vast sprawl of this sociopoetic project.

The Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement starting in the second decade of the twenty-first century is a model of social organization, an intimate bureaucracy, that coalesces beyond any particular protest or set of

demands. The demand for goals, for political and policy objectives, distracts and elides the value of OWS whether one agrees with the protests or not. The demonstration of a working model of an intimate bureaucracy threatens the dominant model of social organization. The privately owned "public park" where the OWS occupied the space for their protest's home base in New York City (Zuccotti Park) required a city permit for microphones and other forms of amplification. When a speaker decides to address the crowd, the crowd repeats the phrase, "MIC check," to call everyone to attention, especially those out of earshot of the speaker. Constraints encourage invention: hence those that can hear the speaker repeat the words so those farther back in the crowd can hear; and those farther back from the speaker repeat, in turn, the phrases just as they hear them. There is sometimes an echo and a time lag as the horizontal amplification reaches those farther away in waves. Usually, the collective chant-repetition of the speaker's phrases simply amplifies the words so that the entire crowd of hundreds can hear. The practice resembles call and response in churches as well as the rote repetition in the scholastic tradition of the Middle Ages. This style of protest, horizontal amplification, extends the normal logos, ethos, and pathos of cultural broadcast and rhetoric by examining a choral response that is absent from descriptions of communication except as a moral warning against "mob psychology."

In the occupation of 'public' space by pedestrians, none of the commentaries have noted that public protest involves protest marches on foot, not in cars; it is just too obvious to note—too much on the surface of the events unfolding. Taking up a "pedestrian" cause (in one sense, an exemplification of the criticism of OWS as failing to inspire the public with clear goals, solutions, and mainstream politics),

with their slow media microphone check, inherently opposes the grand narrative theory, the car-vehicle-of-ideology, a rejection of financial cartels, not with a bigger and better Political Utility Vehicle, but with an intimate bureaucracy and horizontal amplification. Politics, protest, and even the grand narratives of sexuality find themselves challenged by the byke-sexual and masswalkist.

The 1960s witnessed the success of one significant intimate bureaucracy when George Maciunas (born Jurgis Maciunas in Lithuania) encouraged and helped initiate the artists' co-op movement and the street festivals that eventually led to the vitalization of the up-until-then distressed and crumbling New York City neighborhood now known as SoHo (and at the time also included part of Little Italy). Although Maciunas had studied architecture at Cooper Union and Carnegie Institute, he is widely known as the founder of the Fluxus productions and events. Fluxus, in the context of public space, urban design, and the social organization of everyday life, changes its disciplinary category from art history to history-arts (arts as in *ars* or practice). Maciunas issued a "proposed propaganda action" in the April 6, 1963 "Fluxus News-Policy Letter, No. 6" when he listed the following goals of the group: "a) Pickets and demonstrations; b) Sabotage and disruption; c) Compositions; d) Sale of Fluxus publications." This score for future events changes the placing of Fluxus from considering it only as a historical art movement to appreciating it as a strategy for social action and organization as a sociopoetics.