

The Highlights - Superstudio

PART I - LAYING OF THE GROUNDWORK

Generally defined, metabolism is the complete set of reactions necessary for the functioning of an organism. These processes are the basis of life, allowing growth and reproduction, structural maintenance, and environmental response. Metabolism is usually divided into two categories. Catabolic reactions yield energy, an example being the breakdown of sustenance. Anabolic reactions, on the other hand, use this energy to construct systemic components. My particular interest in metabolism is as a metaphor for the operation of a studio practice, and the participation of our practices in the art world.

A recent panel discussion at White Box in Chelsea, entitled *The Obesity of the Art World*, featured Sylvere Lotringer, Johanna Burton, and Fia Backstrom. Foremost among the concerns of the speakers: what significance does a studio practice carry when today's art world, which is brimming with opportunities to show, directly out of school, is overrun with art fairs and biennales? Is it possible for a studio practice to participate in the economic exchange of the art world without succumbing to and subsuming the power of its individuality to a structure of supply and demand? The speakers, particularly Ms. Burton, suggested that the market has, in the last few years, expanded at such a rate that the art world is now "obese."

Obesity is a condition in which the natural energy reserve is increased to a point where it is associated with certain health conditions or increased mortality. While genetic predisposition, as well as the availability of sufficient energy, are necessary for the condition to fully develop, other factors include lack of exercise and the inability to curb appetite.

The myriad opportunities burgeoning on all fronts for artists could be considered a boon. In September of 2005, the inception of gallery season manifest in a record number of openings: 131 in a single evening, by one count. While not the only venue for showing work, because of its proximity and its prominence as a player in the market and as an arena for viewing work, Chelsea is an especially important context to consider in this discussion. My feeling, in brief, is that the sheer quantity of production embodied in this arena engenders the need for a filtration system diametrically opposed to cultivating the private overtures necessary for an experience with work.

My impetus for writing this is to activate a metaphor in the hopes that it will provide a guiding structure for navigating the confluence of art world and art market, and living a long and prosperous life of ideas. My fantasy for the development of my work in relation to its exposure in a public arena has changed in the last several years, and I believe that these

sentiments are mirrored by the ideas of my peers, to varying degrees. While there are never more situations in which to participate in the economy of the art world than there are today, I no longer seek a directly proportional relationship between the development of my ideas and their widespread-ness in the commercial world - which I differentiate from the public eye - partially because I believe this correlation to indicate nothing but a coincidental syncing of a chaotic and capricious system of supply and demand; more importantly because of the potential effects of the gaze and the new pressures exerted by a component of financial cause and effect inserted into the cycle of creativity and creation.

The collective musing/worry at the White Box - how do we 'deal' with this situation, that the art world has become the art market, in unprecedented fashion - reflects these same considerations. With whom does the responsibility lie to change this situation? Is change desirable? Where does the decision begin? We are all complicit in the relationship between the art world and the art market. The decision to attend art school is an individual initiative on some level; the move also carries implications for a particular type of trajectory that is not unlike the trajectory of a business school student.

This distinction between the market and the viewing arena is crucial to the proposition for a solution. This structural metaphor can be applied to the art market (and this is what I believe was intended in the context of the panel) but I also advocate using this as a lens through which to view our individual practices.

How do we overcome our own obesity? What solution to reappropriating the frame of an experiential moment in a platform as overrun with options as the supermarket? Are we doomed to an ever increasing cycle of consumption and growth? This is part manifesto, part question, part proposition to my peers.

We are each a cell with its own metabolism; collectively we contribute to a metabolic process. For the purposes of hope, and for the propagation of the species of production known as art, we must differentiate between the metabolism of the economy and the metabolism of ideas. We must acknowledge that the two are often not mutually exclusive, and that, at some points of our lives, they simply cannot be. We make work; we need to survive. The two can be combined. While our individual praxes are to some extent naturally reactive extensions of ourselves in the world, we have control over their interface of our individual metabolisms with the group metabolism. This interfacing reaction, unlike certain components of the studio practice, is not automatic; my feeling is we must realize a division of labor and responsibility through a set of disciplines that maintains an independent relationship between the two.

I propose the praxis of SUPERSTUDIO, one that carries with it a private practice and takes the current condition as its context. We are in control of the biology of our experiential

metabolisms, the metabolism of our studio practices and the collective metabolism through the vehicle of our individual ones. This has implications both for our individual practices, and how those practices contribute to a collective structure of the art world. In so doing the aim would be to resume control of our own developments, and create conditions from contingencies in ways that allow a continuous renewal of ideas.

In no particular order, this is a partial definition / manifesto / declaration of some of the elements of a superstudio diet / regime / fad.

To disassemble the metaphor and define a few of the analogies: What is the food, the energy, that is feeding our practices? Where is the surfeit, and where is the dearth? Some of the potential culprits: an excess of information (energy) entering our studios.

One constituent component of the energy with which we feed our practices is the information that we receive in our research. Among this information is the exposure we receive to our contemporaries and predecessors through graduate school, through gallery hopping, visiting museums, attending lectures, reading art mags, and going to fairs. The application of this energy is a metabolism that we decide not only are we in possession of the speed of application, how quickly such information filters through our systems, but we are also in control of what aspects are allocated to which parts of our systems. Taking this base condition as a premise, we then have the makings of a set of questions whose responses could form a philosophical diet: When to eat? How often? What sorts of energies does one take in? The food groups (intake categories) could be divided along countless nutritional principles according to the type of diet which fits us best at the time: occasionally a steady stream of galleries (maybe like candy?) provides an electrifying energy, quickly understood in certain manners (simple sugars?); museums supply more complex. Or maybe the work one looks at should all be blue certain weeks (more vitamin C) and orange the next (vitamin A).

A superstudio practice holds itself responsible to its references. It recognizes and realizes the potential for participation in a metabolism of ideas, both preceding and contemporary. It practices discipline in its allusions, and chooses to build ever more complex structures from previous energies and ideas. Collaborative processes are an essential part of superstudio structures as a way of increasing efficiency in metabolism, and enabling an intake of varied ideas for perspective and a balanced nutrition.

The choice of when to show work is an important one, as is the realization that economic forces play not only a financial role in our practices but also a psychological one. My feeling is it is impossible to realize a group of ideas when the linear exchange of a financial contract exerts pressure on a process that is by nature characterized by a constant folding of time and ideas.

However, I remain optimistic that the recent excess of opportunities for artists, particularly young artists, can be channeled into a (more desirable) abundance, rather than a surfeit, as long as we are clear on the role of these exchanges in our personal functioning, and practice a personal honesty with the effects of the subsequent influence on our ideas, and adjust accordingly to incorporate and acknowledgement of these forces in the work itself.

This is a partial list and a constantly shifting group of ideas.