

*Marysia
Lewandowska*

RE-
NEGOTIATION



Partial Disclosure (2008) selection from *Women's Audio Archive* (1984–1990).
RE-NEGOTIATION, Artspace, July 2015. Photograph by Sam Hartnett.

*18 July –
26 August 2015*

ARTSPACE^{NZ}

Singular Pluralities ∞ Plural Singularities

An interview with *Marysia Lewandowska*

Misal Adnan Yildiz: Can you speak about your practice and share your concerns with the general public?

Marysia Lewandowska: It is clear to me that artworks and artists exist within a larger economy of art; an economy built from an interrelated web of curatorships, exhibitions, galleries, museums, archives, places of education, various forms of funding, dealers, collectors, catalogues, books, theorists, critics, press launches, pre-opening dinners, advertising, and so on. And in turn, that economy is nestled in and connected to the intellectual as well as material concerns of our time, namely global capitalism.

Since moving to London in 1985, I have evolved a collaborative way of working, which requires an intensive period of research with the various institutions of art. Rather than being subjected to mechanisms already in place, my interest is in finding alternatives, turning tides and habits, through negotiation and discussion.

I try to imagine a culture of exhibition predicated on use, and on participation open to multiple scripts, programmes, agents, and scores as a critical challenge to the culture of consumption, resisting the promotional logic of a corporate and administered culture, art is able to re-emphasise the world as a vital, awkward, and thrilling experience and not merely as a representation of those experiences, intended for trade. As an artist, I recognise that it is no longer helpful to pretend that I originate the products I make; or more importantly, that I have control over the values and meanings attributed to my practice: Interpretation has superseded intention. In that way, attention shifts from object to discourse, and from product to the context and conditions of production and reception. Instead of thinking in terms of commodities, it seems more useful to think in terms of social relations in which objects may play disparate roles, often binding us into larger communities of shared interests and at other times dividing us along the lines of ownership, gender, cultural heritage.

Conceptual art is an attitude of doubt... A critical stance towards a culture where we feel *heimlich*. Conceptual art viewed in this way is not yet another breakthrough or a step forward. It is rather a degree of self-consciousness giving way to splits and failures, a longing for the lost experience, perhaps one we have never possessed. Here I am paraphrasing the writing of Jerzy Ludwiński, Polish art critic and curator active from the mid 1950s until he died in 2000. It still resonates with many artists now.

MAY: I believe that exhibitions unfold through their titles. Considering your earlier work, *Subject to Change. Negotiation* (2011), how do you think your new project, RE-NEGOTIATION works in the framework of your collaboration with Artspace?

ML: *Negotiation* was part of a larger installation developed at the invitation of the Curating Contemporary Art programme at the Royal College of Art in London. I was working with a team consisting of Antonia Blocker, Robert Leckie and Helena Vilalta. Their graduating show, of which I was a part, was preceded by many months of students' protests across the UK, sparked by the proposals to increase higher education fees. It was the political climate of 2010/11 that led me to focus my research on the history of protest at the RCA itself. My main source of information was a student publication called ARK. I was interested in how the discourse of protest had effected the institution; how much of it or how little of it remained in its bloodstream.

In my mind, all education is a form of negotiation followed by revolt. It is not just a particular skill we develop but also a state of mind, essential to emancipation as well as to activating a critical practice.

This served as a starting point to our conversations and led to developing this collaboration. Since our own history dates back to 2008 when we met at Konstfack in Stockholm, it seemed important for both of us to re-visit what had already existed as a conceptual framework. That way we are giving ourselves a chance to re-negotiate how to work together and how to construct anew the convention of a solo exhibition. It partly involves questioning the roles we play as artist and curator, making visible the process of decision making and sharing it with the public.



Marysia Lewandowska *Subject to Change*. Installation part of *Shadowboxing*, RCA, London 2011.

MAY: Your solo exhibition revisits a long-term project; the *Women's Audio Archive* (1984–1990) focusing on the selection entitled *Partial Disclosure*. The new installation includes a table, designed by Alex Laurie for this presentation, using materials left over from the history of our gallery. You have also requested for the chairs to be borrowed from other institutions in Auckland. How are we to understand this particular gesture? Do you see it as a way of re-contextualising the project?

ML: My decision to occupy the main gallery space at Artspace with a project that touches our imagination and gives priority to the act of listening without relying on fixed aesthetics, is motivated by shifting attention from object to experience as a social process. It sets a scene for a number of negotiations that can be encountered via the recordings as well as those which involve a wider cultural context than the physical space of the gallery.

I began *Women's Audio Archive*, as a systematic activity of documentation, which grew out of the precarity I felt when leaving Warsaw, (a city violated by the martial law, drastically restricting normal life in an attempt to crush political opposition, which was imposed by the communist authorities in December 1981 and lasting until July 1983) and arriving in London to begin intellectual life under new conditions.

By approaching cultural practitioners, mainly women, to record conversations related to their professional and personal struggles, I was able to create meaningful encounters and to begin understanding the new context in which I was just about to practice. This was a private activity of notation, searching for affinities and sharing, resulting in a form of research without a public outcome. It was only 25 years later that the collection of recordings I made at this formative moment in my life has found a public platform, due to the efforts of curator Maria Lind. Her invitation to me was to reconsider the project as part of my residency at the Centre for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, NY in 2009. In the four months, I collaborated with students and turned what was until then a collection of cassette tapes into an online public resource. But, at that point, my interest had also shifted to concerns of intellectual property, as I wanted all of the recordings to be released under Creative Commons licence. That precipitated long and time consuming correspondence with all the people whose voices I held in my possession, embedded in the magnetic tape but with no rights to share it publicly.

RE-NEGOTIATION

My efforts in negotiating those recordings to enter the public domain are now part of the history of the project. The particular presentation of *Partial Disclosure* brings together seminal voices of academics and artists from the 1980s and re-imagines them as participants in a fictional round table discussion. So I am using the archive as a source for constructing a new discourse, while acknowledging the power of historical processes legitimised by institutions. The setting for those recordings is a result of new conversations in Auckland. By inviting Alex Laurie from Auckland, to construct a *mise-en-scène* of material quotations, sourcing from Artspace's existing vocabulary of leftovers, the dialogue extends the symbolic gesture of institutional accumulation into one reverberating with unexpected meanings. It directly points towards the sharing, and the shared.

MAY: Triple C. Editing the Century, the film you made for the first edition of the Vienna Biennale 2015, was inspired by the work of a woman named Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, a Viennese architect and activist. It features in your exhibition here at Artspace projected alongside your research material that is presented on a flat screen inside a silver-painted room. It also runs in parallel with the Auckland Film Festival happening in the city at the moment. What are your thoughts about the works possible reception here; especially given how heavily the real estate market in Auckland has been transformed by the global market.

ML: Living and working in Hong Kong, which is a Special Administrative Region of China, since 2014, has provided me with direct experience of relentless privatisation and its effect on all aspects of life and culture. This film is my first attempt to address some concerns related to the transition from ideals of community and sharing, the basis of the communism I grew up with in Poland, and the one Schütte-Lihotzky has devoted her life to defending, and the systematic destruction of values promoting social equality, caring and justice under the current regime in China, instead providing conditions for property speculation as a means of fast access to wealth creation.

Property relations present a real threat to social architecture, giving advantage to those for whom market conditions are the dominant measure of success. I am not familiar with the situation in Auckland regarding property but, judging by the European context, the Chinese developers are beginning to shape the property market on a large scale.

The film has been conceived for the specific context of MAK (Museum für Angewandte Kunst), where the Vienna Biennale is located. Seen as a collectively produced body that shapes both civic society and public imagination, the contemporary museum is at the same time caught up in a highly competitive market system. From scholarly research to modes of display and from acquisition politics to access of archives, we may ask who underwrites the ongoing struggle between what is privately owned and how it is publicly shared. How can we participate

in re-negotiation of the physical, conceptual and symbolic spaces that make up the public gallery or museum and turn them into the knowledge commons? The film references the archive of Schütte-Lihotzky and her interest in socially motivated practice, which extended across the realms of design, writing, and activism and lasted for 80 years, while her life spanned the entire 20th century. For the young generation of Chinese professionals, like the young architect I interviewed, Communism and Capitalism are much alike, a notion I myself find highly problematic and hard to accept.

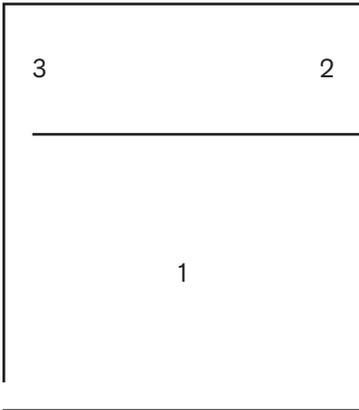
While I have no intention of holding on to any sense of communist nostalgia, I am trying to recover the commons and its ascendant values of publicness for the contemporary experience. An important part of the film is its powerful soundtrack, which has been created by Eileen Simpson and Ben White, the artists behind the Open Music Archive project. They have sourced recordings from the 20th century repertoire, which are out of copyright and have therefore reverted to public domain: That way their soundtrack, released under Creative Commons, redistributes the creative output of many artists before us.

MAY: Your exhibition brings together a range of professionals, amongst whom are Leon Tan from Unitec in Auckland, Aileen Burns and Johan Lundh, Co-Directors of the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane, the group Architecture+Women+NZ and connects with the curatorial symposium at AUT University. Your engagement has led us to create an intense public programme, which has shifted the emphasis away from the opening night. Instead of giving priority to the opening, you seem to be celebrating a distributed discussion and engagement culminating in a closing event. Is this a deliberate artistic strategy?

ML: I am interested in an open model of practice, which can be characterized by its ability to adapt, build networks, nourish friendships, and work across generations and across different areas of expertise. I have often adopted improvisatory tactics, and chose contexts which allow for greater self-institution. Rather than conceiving an artwork, which is taken to the designated space of display in the gallery, I insist on longer periods involving locally based research, negotiation and building of trust.

My present concern is not only with how to maintain the practice of art itself, but also a commitment to creating circumstances in which art could cut across hierarchies, accommodate contradiction, offer and maintain a site of social imagination. Working with the team at Artspace has culminated in many fruitful exchanges inside a relatively dense schedule from conception to realisation. Working remotely has its advantages, as it leaves space for decisions to be modified on the spot by people who possess tacit knowledge through their intimate involvement with the organisation itself. Writing this, I am anticipating the outcome of our collaborative efforts and an encounter with the audience through a number of public events.

List of works



1. *Partial Disclosure* (2008) selection from
Women's Audio Archive (1984–1990)
www.marysialewandowska.com/waa

2. *Triple C. Editing the Century 18'49"* (2015)
Courtesy of the University of Applied Arts, Vienna.
Collection and Archive

3. Research material towards
Triple C. Editing the Century 2'54" (2015)

Contributors

Table design and production Alex Laurie
commissioned by Artspace and
Marysia Lewandowska

Chair lenders

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
Fresh Gallery Otara
George Fraser Gallery, University of Auckland
McCahon House Trust Artists Residency
Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision
ST PAUL St Gallery, AUT University
Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery
University of Auckland

Conversation partners

Architecture+Women NZ,
Aileen Burns & Johan Lundh of IMA Brisbane
Abby Cunnane & Charlotte Huddleston of
ST PAUL St Gallery,
Leon Tan

Thanks to Billy Apple for his collaboration on the
Billy Apple® Wall (Red) for Artspace, (2015)

Installation

Patrick Lundberg
Zak Penny
Tim Wagg

Volunteers

Liam Coupe
Süleyman Günay
Kate Hyun Soo Lee

Sign Writers

TMSigns, Terry Maitland & Chris Field

Suppliers

Aalto
Profile Plus

Design

DD/MM/YY

Artspace team

Louisa Afoa
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Leah Mulgrew
Cynthia Smith
Misal Adnan Yıldız

Education Intern

Curatorial Assistant

Administrative Manager

Communications Coordinator

Project Support

Director

Supported by the

ARTSPACE Benefactor Programme+

*Open Conversations on the
Politics of Negotiation*

18 July 2pm

Orientation: Why this Exhibition at Artspace?

An introduction by Misal Adnan Yıldız.

5 August 6pm

Artist's Intervention to the Programme

Auckland based researcher Leon Tan will present
a lecture as part of #ReadwithArtspace.

18 August 6pm

Architecture+Women•NZ panel discussion

A round table discussion on Communism,
Capitalism and Commons produced by
Architecture+Women NZ, in collaboration with
Artspace.

21 August 3pm

(Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Auditorium)

A Critical Junction – presented as part of the ST

PAUL St Curatorial Symposium, convened by
Abby Cunnane & Charlotte Huddleston.

Marysia Lewandowska and Misal Adnan Yıldız
reflect on the politics of negotiation departing
from their collaboration.

24 August 6pm

Some Necessary Connections

Artspace hosts Marysia Lewandowska together
with IMA Directors, Aileen Burns & Johan
Lundh from Brisbane. The event will include an
exhibition tour and a discussion aiming to create
a critical arch between the exhibition histories of
the IMA and Artspace.