The Metropolitan Complex

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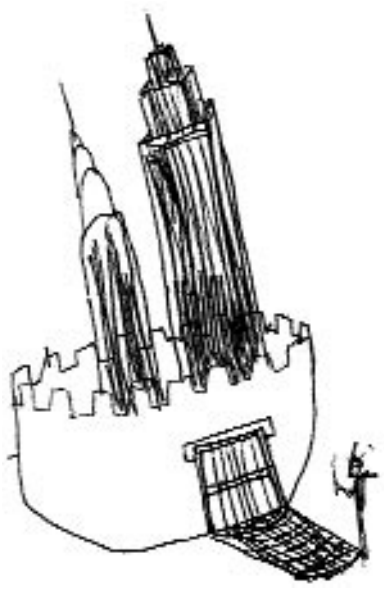

Roundtable Discussion

Participants: Rachel Urkowitz, Gareth James, Martine Kaczynski, Jimbo Blachly, Graham Parker and Sarah Pierce.

On Saturday 9 October 2004 the following conversation took place in the studio wing of PS1 MoMA in New York. Sarah Pierce invited the participants to have an informal discussion. There was no audience present.

Sarah Pierce The starting point of this conversation is New York. From here, there are loose associations among the group today: we are all artists, we are generally the same generation, three of us are American, three are British. Then there is the context; we are here because of a project taking place in the former studio wing of PS1, organised by two British curators, that involves artists from the UK and New York. Poised on the closure of PS1's international studio programme, and funded by The Henry Moore Foundation's Contemporary Projects (which are also ending) and Grizedale Arts. The British never had a studio space here, so since I work in Dublin I thought it was suitable for us to meet in the studio formerly used by the Republic of Ireland. I'd like to talk about some of the myths that surround coming to New York and working here as an artist. We don't necessarily have to dispel them, but maybe we can think about them in relation to our own experiences. One that I've heard is that there are no alternative spaces left in New York. Truth or myth?

Martine Kaczynski What do you mean by that?

Sarah Pierce The artist run or alternative spaces that began here in the late sixties and early seventies, places like Artist Space for instance, have evolved into the establishment. Meanwhile, artists may be running spaces but they model the behaviour of these established nonprofits, which in turn seem to model galleries and museums. So everyone conforms to a mode of operation that alternative spaces were initially set up to work against.

Martine Kaczynski I have noticed that more recently in Williamsburg. Six, seven years ago there were real experimental spaces there and the rent was cheap enough to house experimental work. As rents increased the galleries became fancier and now most of them now are bolting over to Chelsea. Bellwether's just gone over, Jessica Murray's gone over, Roebling Hall… All in seven, eight months.

Rachel Urkowitz Do you think they opened as alternative spaces?

Martine Kaczynski They did. Now they are selling spaces purely in the centre of the mainstream. Before Jessica Murray was Jessica Murray Projects and Roebling Hall was a gallery, they were together as Salon 75, which I was a part of. Definitely it was a place for experimental, alternative, large-scale work. Jessica now primarily deals with paintings because she sells them. Here's the problem: if you have to pay the rent, you have to sell the work that is in the gallery. The bottom line is money. They are struggling as much as we are as artists.

Sarah Pierce How do artists feel about what you are describing—about alternative spaces becoming more commercial? Or closing altogether, like Thread Waxing Space, or the studio wing here at PS1, or the Dia Center in Chelsea?

Rachel Urkowitz Well, Dia is moving to Beacon, at least for the moment.

Martine Kaczynski Right. Things are spreading beyond the five boroughs. Every weekend you read about an alternative show taking place upstate. It's the same with real estate. The only way alternative projects can happen financially is when an area is still cheap enough to house it. There's a reason why the Dia is moving from Chelsea, why it's got Beacon. Now if you go to Beacon, galleries are starting to open there. There's going to be a huge artist community along the Hudson now. Galleries *and* artists are buying real estate around the area, taking over entire factories at a time and redoing them, which you can't do here anymore. It's just like any other kind of economy; you go to the outskirts of a city and that's where the alternative stuff is.

Jimbo Blachly It seems that way to me, too. Franklin Furnace was in Lower Manhattan and that closed years ago. Now they are a virtual space. There was alternative action in SoHo in the '60s, but at the time SoHo was the edge, and that edge just keeps moving out.

Sarah Pierce I guess I question whether that edge is at all alternative anymore. I recently saw an invitation for a show taking place in New Jersey that described itself as 'outside the artworld'. But the rhetoric was self-conscious and seemed to want an audience that was familiar with the terms it used-terms rooted fast in the artworld-so what does it mean to be 'outside'?

Jimbo Blachly The 'outside' or the 'underground' have become market terms. A lot of artists had loft spaces in the '70s and they could do performances and happenings, and then in the late '80s and '90s artists had loft spaces in Williamsburg, and they had performances and happenings, and now I hear about stuff that happens on the Montrose stop in loft spaces, and artists in Williamsburg might not even know about it. I live beyond there and I hear about things after the fact.

Martine Kaczynski Students now live in Bushwick and the alternative midnight performances and gatherings happen there. Again, it is to do with finances. Williamsburg is out of control now, which wasn't the case just a few years ago. SoHo was SoHo because at one time it was cheap enough for artists to live there.

Graham Parker What I find interesting in a broader sense is what's happening in a lot of cities through a reassertion of the city centre as an actual articulated strategy and not a default process. It seems like a medieval logic. Manhattan becomes a walled-city, the city of London becomes walled. What seems a pragmatic decision to live beyond the pale, because it is affordable or provides breathing space to organize, is potentially the basis of a political position. I wanted to throw that out there—the idea of these articulated centres and what it means to operate just outside them.

Gareth James I like this Freudian idea of a 'metropolitan complex' because there's a degree to which it's hard not to lapse into a certain cynicism in these discussions—about how bad New York is to us. It is a little bit like suing cigarette companies for your cancer problems. There's a cut-off point where the insurance companies and the tobacco companies say, "It's just not our fault. You knew the risks." So what are the reasons for coming to New York in the first place? For most people in our generation, it's a bit disingenuous to refer to the mythical days of downtown SoHo. It might be a reason for coming, but it is a great alibi as well. Other reasons for coming hide what is actually an attraction to power, right? Which is one way of approaching the question. Then there's history, which is certainly connected to power but not simply about flagrant super-power. I'm wondering what other reasons there are so that we can avoid whingeing about our situation, and try to figure out why people keep coming here, and in what ways these reasons are contradictory and conflicting.

Martine Kaczynski You come to New York because it has so much art going on and you want to absorb all of it like a sponge. When you're involved in the arts, especially when you're younger you want to learn everything you can, and this is an amazing place for that. You're exposed to so much art, so many people. That's a huge draw. And as a foreigner you don't feel isolated here because to be a foreigner is to be normal. You can walk down the road and be completely culturally assimilated. The minus is that you get over-saturated, and that's when the cynicism enters. You start thinking, what the hell am I doing here, I'm just another schmo on the street?

Sarah Pierce For me moving to New York wasn't a conscious manoeuvre as an artist. I came via Los Angeles and then grad school, and I didn't identify with the artworld here at all. My reference points were on the West Coast. In fact, my choice to come here had almost nothing to do with being an artist. But funnily enough, when I geared up to leave after six years suddenly all those shows in Chelsea that I never went to seemed to matter, and I was truly anxious about moving a little too far from the centre.

Rachel Urkowitz I knew a lot of artists in New York in the mid-90s who moved to LA. They'd been struggling in New York, never showing their work. As LA artists they became a very interesting commodity and started showing in New York. They were doing the same exact work, and it was just as good when it was in New York, but it was transformed by leaving. I'm from New York, so I didn't make a choice to come to here; it was by default. It strikes me that New York is always the same, it keeps moving, but the more things change, the more they stay the same. There is this sense that if you leave, everything will change all of a sudden, and it's only staying the same because you're here, and that is the anxiety that New

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York produces in you. In fact, if you go away for five years and come back, it's remarkably unchanged. Even though there may be seven new condominiums on the block where you used to have your cheap studio, and all your friends have moved several subway stops away, it's more like a rotation. Like volleyball, people rotate places but they are all still playing the same game.

Graham Parker For me New York wasn't London. I came from Manchester, where I had been for 12 years, and had made a very deliberate choice to exist as a provincial artist with the quixotic idea that you could reclaim that phrase—which, you know, you live and learn. I remember a point at which the British Art Show in 1995 opened in Manchester and they took over all the institutional spaces that there were in the city. It was the height of the YBA moment and there were, I think, 27 London artists, three Glasgow artists, and one from Nottingham selected for the show. At a press conference Richard Cork was asked about this and he said, "Well, any artist (in Britain) worth their salt moves to London anyway." It crystallized that I could not go to London. It was too late for me, for that salt-mine. If I had to go to London, it would be through another agreed brokerage centre such as New York. To go to New York and be sold back to London. I have to stress this is all kind of tongue-in-cheek, since these 'trade' processes seemed so remote to my quotidian experience of being an artist in a city which didn't register on the artworld's commercial map.

Rachel Urkowitz Certainly one of the most dominant myths about New York is that it's the centre of financial power in the artworld. That's perhaps what makes you cynical. People say, "Oh, it's all about money here," but that's also what makes it sexy. As an artist you hate it and you love it—maybe I can be avant-garde and still buy a loft.

Gareth James I moved to New York because I was sick of the London art scene. I actually wanted to stop being an artist and nobody was talking about New York. It was the least sexy place on the face of the earth.

Martine Kaczynski When did you come?

Gareth James End of '97.

Martine Kaczynski Was it not sexy then?

Gareth James It was not sexy like Scandinavia (which was just waking up after a one night stand before all sexiness went to Berlin).

Graham Parker I want to hear more of that analogy.

Gareth James What Sarah said about coming here was interesting. As an artist do you have to make all your decisions based upon that fact (of being an artist), or are there other reasons which might be less consciously articulated? Wanting to go to the city can be about how you construct your subjecthood. There's a sense in which the city itself is already a project that articulates a specific historical point and you feel that your subjectivity will be constructed in a way that is relevant to the development of the world, politically and socially.

Martine Kaczynski Are you talking about an instinctive, internal world?

Gareth James It's how you construct your identity, and the knowledge that if you don't do work on your subjectivity you're not going to do much work on your art practice. The art practice has to originate from practices of the self. So you move to New York because you think it is at a point of capitalist crisis or you go to Ghana to study the development of urban sprawl. You pick and choose where it is to be a relevant subject before you move there to become a relevant artist. Or you move to a small, sleepy city, like Copenhagen—even after the one night stand thing—because what you need is about being in a community that is small, and you decide to construct a subject that way instead. There are different options.

Martine Kaczynski So why did you come?

Gareth James New York was a place where I could stop being an artist, and it was a place that nobody was talking about. I came to do the Whitney Program, which was meant to guarantee me to stop being an artist.

Rachel Urkowitz Did it work?

Martine Kaczynski Hold on. You don't come to New York to stop being an artist…

Graham Parker I thought I would stop too. I was seeking the cure.

Rachel Urkowitz As a native New Yorker I sometimes feel provincial, while the international artists I know feel they belong here. To be here because you've chosen to be here, either to become an artist or to stop, is somehow more sophisticated.

Sarah Pierce Jimbo, what do you have to say about this?

Jimbo Blachly I feel like Rachel. I feel like a provincial artist in New York. I came here 1990 and since then I have left three times for no more than two months at a time. Artists who come from abroad have an international cachet. I grew up in New Jersey and went to school in Chicago, but I didn't want to live there and I didn't want to go to the West Coast, and I couldn't imagine myself going to Europe, so New York seemed like the natural place to come back to. The idea of leaving for a little while and then returning seems to carry an almost constant myth of allure for artists in New York. The thought of moving to a small town and having a more balanced, healthy life, which who knows, might improve your work.

Martine Kaczynski I fantasize about six months in London, six months in New York.

Jimbo Blachly Sure that's the ideal. So how do you do that?

Graham Parker In Britain, they call it 0.6. It's the perfect three-day teaching job split up over time in such a way that you can take these short sabbaticals. It's entirely mythical as far as I can tell. I don't know anyone who can divide their time in that way.

Sarah Pierce Wherever I am, I am plotting my escape. Not to get too autobiographical but it comes from moving around a lot. At the time I left New York, everyone was talking about the Greater New York Show, who was in and more importantly, how did they get there? There was the Brooklyn show, which was about authenticating workspace, and the Williamsburg show. I never quite identify fully with where I live so these shows seem strange to me. Inevitably, if you want to create a nasty local polemic, just curate one of these shows. Artists buy into it. I'm kind of wondering why?

Rachel Urkowitz It has more to do with the questions of inside and outside which you mentioned before. If you are in the show, whatever it happens to be—you could argue the Whitney Biennial has the same effect—you are part of something. But it's not as if these shows are defining movements, or as though someone's writing a manifesto…

Sarah Pierce But they claim, through their titles, to represent a local scene.

Rachel Urkowitz The guidelines for the second Greater New York show suggests that artists who were in the first one, although they couldn't apply, were encouraged to recommend artists for this one. I was surprised to see that.

Martine Kaczynski That's how these things are done. It's all based on personal recommendations.

Rachel Urkowitz Sure, but to see that stated on an application form in writing is a little unnerving.

Sarah Pierce Why does PS1 feel it is necessary to promote this type of competition between artists? Why play to the market that way?

Graham Parker That power of the market is so proximate, I mean physically proximate in New York. With the provincial, your experience of the artworld and the debates around it is mediated. You make a daily choice to encounter it in whatever form. Moving to New York, this was a real concern for me; to be daily taunted, *subjected*, by or to that proximity of power which you have no foothold in and which you were seeing all around you…

Martine Kaczynski Yes, it's almost humiliating.

Graham Parker Part of what happens with this inside, outside is a privileging of certain artists at a given moment.

Martine Kaczynski The inside and outside here is like business under the guise of social. You are socializing with people to do business with them. You're not socializing because you really like them.

Sarah Pierce It's the opposite in Dublin where its social under the guise of business.

Martine Kaczynski Here that whole in/out thing has to do with wheeling and dealing. The politics and the power venture around shows has to do with who you know, who you hang with, where you are going on a Thursday night.

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Sarah Pierce Look, art is a social practice and what we do involves interacting with each other. How decisions are reached is part of the dynamic. So going back to a local polemic, the power exerted by institutions in a show like Greater New York is quite threatening, the stakes and claims on territory quite extreme. Maybe this corresponds to what Gareth was saying: It's easy to fall into a cynical discussion, but these shows have real effects and how they resonate locally is something institutions need to consider. The market is always willing to divide and conquer…

Martine Kaczynski We are here to do art and that means we are here to try and get ahead. If that world has to do with politics, mediation, or socializing, you either have to do a radical left turn and get out or decide that actually as an artist I am busy, I am doing my work and I am in charge of my own negotiations.

Gareth James It's fuzzier than that. There was this German judge, one of Freud's case studies, named Judge Schreber, who went completely paranoid and crazy. He thought that God was fucking him with rays of sunlight. He was a judge, his father was a judge and he was totally tied into society. Eric Santner wrote a book about him, and his thesis was that Schreber's problems came not from the absence of any symbolic legitimising functions, but from an over-proximity to too many of them. Everywhere he turned there was something announcing his status. Nonetheless, he had these nervous crises where he could see that these symbolic investitures meant absolutely nothing at all in and of themselves. They had no foundation to them except brute social power. In a sense it's like New York. Taking part in the Greater New York exhibition doesn't matter. It's just one of many legitimating devices.

Sarah Pierce You realize that artists in New York are dependent on galleries for that legitimating status. On a certain level it is meaningless.

Gareth James Yes, and there's a diffuseness to the patterns here which makes it difficult to orientate yourself, which has to do with proximity too. Graham's idea of the walled city is specific to New York in that the majority of artists here live outside of the historic geographical bounds, and that questions whether those geographic bounds are the symbolic bounds, as well. There's a conference happening right now for the 10th anniversary of Guy Debord's suicide. Attending that and knowing that I was coming to this today made me wonder how to even start to articulate a relationship to the city. Do you start from the micro level and work out the ways that power is already pervading your choices, or do you start from Debord's level where the big problem is capital. We don't say that frequently enough and there isn't any consensus about it.

Sarah Pierce True. I was here in August right before the Republican National Convention. I left, thank God, before it took place, but I was thinking about it this morning when I woke up in my friend's apartment. I turned my head on the pillow and there on the bookcase was the catalogue from the Degenerate Art Show, with the subtitle "The fate of the avant-garde in Nazi Germany." It suddenly struck me: Wow! There was a time when artists were actually threatening to the state. Today, artists mobilize and protest, but do they penetrate that wall of power through acts of art? It's curious to think about that in relation to any political identification with being an 'artist'.

Graham Parker I've just been here a little over a year and one of the first phenomena I noticed were businesses going through an entire business cycle. You go past a little shop on Seventh Avenue that opens up. They start selling cell phones, and they're closed before the guarantee on the phone runs out. I suppose it's quite telling when I think about my own economic position or where I've come from that I identify more with that cell phone vendor than I do with an artist from Spain who might also be living in the city.

Jimbo Blachly It's a little different perhaps, but I've had a full-time job the whole time I've been in New York. So am I an artist or am I a worker, a nine to fiver? I work at an art conservation studio so I think of myself as this worker in the art industry in addition to being an artist. It's funny, most of my artwork is not meant to last, but I don't think that is a result of working in an art conservationist.

Martine Kaczynski How can you know?

Jimbo Blachly Well, I was doing performance art before and have always had a personal interest in things that look temporary rather than the fixed thing.

Martine Kaczynski But you work on the fixed thing from 9 to 5 every day.

Jimbo Blachly I document the damage to the fixed things.

Martine Kaczynski Excellent, that's even better.

Sarah Pierce An artist friend of mine from Copenhagen, who lives here funded by the Danish government, used to see me on the way to work in the morning and say, "Are you going to your job again today?" And I would say, "Yes, I go *every* day." It fascinated him.

Martine Kaczynski 9 to 5 is what every artist is trying to avoid. I don't know how you sustain that kind of energy. The way I work there's just no way I could do that. The joy of teaching is that I can cover my ass in two or three days. I'm exhausted, but in the end of the day, it is a job that allows me to be a functional artist, which means being an artist who can get into the studio to do the work. A lot of the struggle is on that level. Doesn't matter how long people are in this business. Even Judy Pfaff, who's won the MacArthur Grant, is working full-time at Bard. This is the practical maintenance. Graham, you're in the Whitney Program, so you're not on the treadmill of getting a job yet. You're struggling for VISAs at the moment. That's a whole other job in itself. To come over here and try and find a way to stay was one of the most stressful experiences I ever went through. Basic survival takes up more energy than anything else.

Sarah Pierce That and a hearty New York social life.

Martine Kaczynski I actually don't mix with anyone but artists, and I find that to be problematic. It makes me feel walled in. There's little outlet for me to meet other people outside of the art world and it becomes insular. I'm happy when I find someone who does a job that has nothing to do with art and can give me some mental stimuli. After a while I get bored of talking about art. When I go back to London, I get to hang out with friends who are doctors, musicians, et cetera.

Rachel Urkowitz Every once in a while, I invite my artist friends to meet my other friends and they get all excited.

Martine Kaczynski Yeah, to see what other people do. They live in houses with carpets, man.

Graham Parker When I came here I consciously cultivated friends and contacts who had nothing to do with art.

Martine Kaczynski Where'd you find them? Got any names? Phone numbers? I'll pay you.

Graham Parker The first rule of fight club is you don't talk about it… Having been in another city where everyone I knew were artists or were involved with the arts, Pierogi is an interesting example for me because it was one that travelled anecdotally. I am interested in the constituency of people who move in and around that space.

Rachel Urkowitz Pierogi is a gallery run by an artist, but it's unique to the person running it. Joe is just a very unique person. He's welcoming to people, so it grows. It is not a clique where you are in or out.

Jimbo Blachly Although some people do find it that way. It doesn't matter where you go, there's always the in and the out. Initially anybody could bring their work in and he would add it to the flat files and ask how much do you want to sell that for, and he'd take 20 percent. But it's gotten to the point where there's so many artists and he's saturated.

Graham Parker I'm just thinking about how myths travel and how then they become revisited back upon a place.

Sarah Pierce Which become unofficial endorsements of the scene.

Martine Kaczynski That happens, but they aren't removed from the countless official endorsements. Pierogi is listed in magazines like Time Out.

Jimbo Blachly If you really want to go to the edge, go to some small town in Ohio and look at all the Bush posters in everybody's yard.

Sarah Pierce Does anyone here identify strongly with an institution?

Jimbo Blachly Pierogi seems to be where that identification happens for me politically and in terms of a community. It's driven by artists, not by the market. Those are the most enjoyable openings to go to because it's more like a party. Not that business isn't happening. Obviously it is, but it feels better in that regard as opposed to openings in Chelsea, which, you know, they can be fun sometimes, but

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you can't rely on it.

Gareth James It seems important to establish when Pierogi opened, because one of the things that transmits itself about Pierogi is that the place is a survivor.

Rachel Urkowitz It's their ten-year anniversary.

Martine Kaczynski Socrates Sculpture Park is another survivor.

Rachel Urkowitz Socrates was started by Mark DeSuvero and it was initially his vision. He wanted to create a place specifically for outdoor sculptures in New York City.

Martine Kaczynski Right, which is a good thing. It's changed a lot. It's been running for a long time now, and it used to feel like a big macho metal sort of place where you'd get no contemporary work. Now women are running it and it's done a 180. It is not so insular that only art and artists go there, the community in the area is pulled into the park on a regular basis. A lot of that is about reaching out to the community, which I admire.

Gareth James I find community outreach to be a way of assuaging the problems of culture, a way of massaging the separations. I'm interested in models that are about developing serious ties into local practices with people that can be very political, but when it is done just under a culture register…

Martine Kaczynski Meaning what?

Gareth James Meaning when it's just about art or about creativity…

Martine Kaczynski As opposed to what?

Gareth James As opposed to spaces that developed first and foremost out of real social surroundings, like the Lower East Side's Henry Street Settlement or The Angel Oresanz Synagogue. They are not restricted to one type of cultural agenda. Outreach shouldn't just be about spreading goodness and creativity in a kind of liberal way. It should be about addressing the problems of separation of culture in the first place that also have a relationship to political problems which persist and are not going to have a single dent made in them by way of a programmed cultural response. One of the ways in which art gets manipulated by some grant-making bodies, which is the other side of evil capitalist marketing, is through public funding. With public funding, art is meant to operate as a salve to certain groups, and that's something we have to be just as suspicious of. It's a false reconciliation of divisions.

Sarah Pierce I completely agree. In order to receive money, not just from the government but from private foundations, institutions pander to a presumption that 'art is good', but what we are actually talking about in these cases is not art. It is another interface altogether under the guise of 'art'. One that reflects the values of funders, who let's face it, in the case of private foundations in the US, represent the elite of the elite.

Martine Kaczynski I understand the phoney-baloney side of it. I know it's a financial tax bracket and every single museum in this country has to have an outreach program or an educational department. But I have also worked on these outreach programs they do produce a different intake and outtake. So art suddenly is not how we view it anymore. When you work with people who have not experienced art and feel incredibly trapped you realize a purity that has been lost. None of us remember the joy and freedom. It helps us as much as it helps them.

Gareth James Absolutely, even the worst intentioned bullshit can have unexpected contingent effects.

Martine Kaczynski Seriously, for people who don't have, if that money is doing something beneficial does it matter what we think about it?

Gareth James But what happens is that art gets posited as a positive identity for the notion of community, which is oddly erroneous. The art community is a horrible, torturous, fractured, divided system, and the ideological development in the '90s of the artist as this creative person who can work in the community because they are a mobile freelancer perpetuates a system where the artist who has no health benefits, no job security, no stability feeds an ideological model. Andrew Ross has written about this.

Sarah Pierce It's part of a neo-liberal policy where artists can be placed in all sorts of contexts and somehow make them 'better' by being there, but when it comes to directly giving money to poor people, that is out of the question.

Rachel Urkowitz The question is who benefits from the structures that the artist is serving? The artist is always disenfranchised. It goes back to this idea of a crenulated city, the walled city. It reminds me of what Jimbo was saying about his job. You're working doing this double labour, you do your 9 to 5, and then you do this other work too as an artist.

Gareth James Sweat equity plans are a nice model for me because on the one hand, they are aimed at low income families that have trouble entering the market system for housing. So they promise to do a certain amount of labour, 40 hours a week or so, then they get subsidies to build houses, but on the other hand the amount of money that's available for those programs is increased or decreased depending upon whether the state wants to heat up or cool down the housing market. So again it's a double labour that's in operation, one is a real kind of literal work, and one is of a political, economic variety.

Martine Kaczynski That's always going to be there with funding.

Gareth James One of the great Situationist International phrases was 'never work.' Artists think that they aren't working that they are doing something else…

Sarah Pierce Like Jimbo, I have always had a job (or jobs) and a few years ago I got tired of differentiating the work I do as an artist from my work as an administrator. It's not about blurring the boundaries (which has become fashionable), I just don't make it that simple for people anymore when they ask me whether I am an artist or a curator, or something else. I do lots of things. It is a 'practice' that involves a practice of the self, like Gareth described. There is an artist I know in Bilbao, Asier Perez, who doesn't do anything unless he's paid. This includes travelling to all those supplemental activities like conferences or biennales that artists flock to even though they are the only ones there who aren't being paid.

Martine Kaczynski Right, but supporting everyone else financially. Again, we've been fed on the idea that what we do is free and should be free, or that we should be making work and doing work without being paid. It's different when we help each other as artists because that's a two way street. People will ring me when they need me and vice versa, and a lot of work gets done that way. Like this today. To me it is when community functions and feels good. It's a barter system rather than a money system.

Graham Parker I'm glad you used the phrase barter. Every aspect of strategic thought—those significant moves like changing city or changing job—I tend to justify in terms of barter. If I do this it's a trade-off with that, this buys me space or it buys me some time. I'm still not entirely sure what I've lost in this trade to New York.

Martine Kaczynski You won't know for another three years, it's like signing up for the five-year plan.

Graham Parker I'm still a director of floating ip in Manchester so the artists and other people that I meet and work with here tend to get earthed through that.

Sarah Pierce For me those barters are about negotiating the terms of being an artist.

Graham Parker For me too. Working from a space, working from a city, working from a certain constituency of people, can all be termed under the catchall flag 'artist'—it's the best short hand. So all those identities of the artist can give you a sense of agency for arriving in another place. I'm still choosing to hold onto those agencies which are grounded through the physical side as I'm operating here. In part, because of what I was talking about before in the ways that the mythologies of somewhere like Pierogi travel. You realize this does look like a walled city. It doesn't look that porous. I think I'll keep my passport.

Rachel Urkowitz So even though you've heard that there's an openness to places like Pierogi, when you get here that's not apparent, that sense of access is not there.

Graham Parker No, it is apparent in those places. You're actually very aware that the relational foundations are there and are a bit alien to you so you are not going to be instantly familiar with them. Maybe that's a good thing.

Martine Kaczynski Considering you've only been here for a year, you're doing really well. Obviously I'm joking with you, but I'm also serious insofar as the first year, just to find where the Laundromat is and where your bed is and have you enough cash to pay the bagel guy on the corner 50 cents, let alone

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understanding the political, social concepts of the art world, is a pure street level survival scenario for most of us.

Sarah Pierce In terms of survival places like the Whitney Program and PS1 can be a good way to enter New York, but it wasn't until I moved to Dublin that I realized what PS1's studio programme symbolizes for foreign artists. It isn't as simple as just getting to New York. It has to do with what Graham describes as a physical local identity grounded in another place and then brokered through New York, and how that plays out for the foreign artist at home. With its closing a certain connection between New York and Europe is gone.

Graham Parker This was a space that I used to come to. There were always three or four people in the residency who would be on my itinerary when I was visiting the city.

Gareth James It is also closing a site of production and turning it over to more display spaces which raises contested issues around what is the productive aspect of art spaces in New York regardless of what their particular nature is. There's a side-story there. Rhea Anastas wrote a piece about the changing nature of the gallery system and all of the appearances of the commercial galleries in New York since the '60s. She describes the way in which galleries modelled themselves on collectors' apartments…

Rachel Urkowitz Right, as homes. You'd visit the space and visit the dealer.

Jimbo Blachly Velvet on the walls and curtains.

Rachel Urkowitz There are still some galleries uptown that are in beautiful brownstones or townhouses. You go in and feel like you're in a wealthy person's house. There's a doorman, or you ring the bell to get in. It's all very well-heeled. People going to the gallery buy the work and bring it back to their house, which looks the same.

Gareth James Anastas goes on to say that in the move to SoHo, there was this sense in which the galleries took over the same spaces that the artists were using, and essentially left them looking a bit more raw: the gallery starts to emulate the point of production rather than the point of sale. Now with this move to Chelsea the gallery seems to be identifying more with museums, so that idea of the gallery connecting to some point in production has gone.

Sarah Pierce Or perhaps Chelsea *is* still emulating the production site, which now refers less to the raw studio and more to a sleek showroom.

Martine Kaczynski I've got to say, I notice students now are much cleaner in their studios. Partly because they're doing more computer work and more sound work. But it's also about a direct transposition of work into the gallery. The studio starts looking like a white cube.

Jimbo Blachly Well, there is also the myth of the studio being a chaotic mess. Equally, there's the myth of the post-studio artist.

Sarah Pierce What's that?

Jimbo Blachly It's the artist who's moved beyond the handmade, beyond the fabricated.

Sarah Pierce I remember reading a piece in Art Forum that was printed when Colin Deland died, where Andrea Frazer talked about Colin asking to see her work, and she said, "I don't have a studio." And he answered, "Well, if you have an idea I'll give you a show in the gallery." Is that what you mean?

Jimbo Blachly Yes.

Sarah Pierce Is it old fashioned to have a studio?

Jimbo Blachly Perhaps a little conservative, yes.

Martine Kaczynski It's a hierarchy to do with labour.

Jimbo Blachly Or you're just working in such a way that you don't need a studio.

Martine Kaczynski No I'm sorry, it's a putdown to people who do labour. Like the war between the painters and sculptors, where painters would look at sculptors and think of them as labourers and dumb. Makers are looked down upon.

Sarah Pierce Are you kidding?

Gareth James Come on, biennials are full of people that make things in studios. The post-studio identity is important, but it's the same as post-industrialism: It's not that it's absolutely the case for everybody in terms of a literal practice, but it *is* the dominant hegemonic moment of the organization of art. So it doesn't matter if you're welding bits of steel in your studio, which is some vast 5,000 square meter loft or whether you are Andrea Frazer coming up with an idea. For both, the point of display is the gallery. So everybody is working under the dominant term of post-studio. It applies to everybody and nobody. Studio practice—as the stage in the mode of production prior to display—is no more marginal than it used to be. Even the poster child for post-studio art still shares aspects of production which are somehow studio-like insofar as the mode of production precedes the point of display, which is the point of dissemination, legitimisation…

Jimbo Blachly Exactly, that's the thing. You're doing something that is going to end up in some institution whether or not you're not working out of a studio. As though by saying you are post-studio you're outside of that.

Sarah Pierce So we identify the means of production as subversive, instead of looking at how our output is functioning and how much we as artists have a handle on dissemination.

Gareth James With greater or lesser degrees of voluntary identification or mis-identification.

Graham Parker A lot of studio spaces that I was involved in early on seemed to be trying to break with some kind of dominant models we inherited where you went out of the local art school and you find an abandoned factory space, and then you replicated a particular discipline. The little glimpse of difference that we had came because of computers impacting on the light print industry in the centre of the city that I lived in. New spaces became available because of the 2,000 square foot space that lost their contract. There was a very brief practical moment where I, despite the fact that a lot of my practice was using computers, would find that there was this space that was available. And we still had this residual sense that this is what you automatically should gravitate towards, not towards the screen.

Sarah Pierce Shit, speaking of space, we need to stop by 6 or we will be locked inside PS1 for the night. Any last words?

Rachel Urkowitz If any of you want to meet my non-artist friends I'm planning a party next week at a bar outside of the city wall.

Martine Kaczynski Can I just ask where is the city wall?

Rachel Urkowitz It keeps moving.

Jimbo Blachly It's in your head.

Sarah Pierce At the edge of the dark forest.

Rachel Urkowitz Right now it seems to be around Bushwick.

Gareth James Does anyone want to sum up the conversation?

Rachel Urkowitz Sure, history, power, the crenulated city, and real estate underlying all of this. Maybe the post-studio condition comes back to that, that actually the solution to creating community in New York is for everyone to just give up their studio so we can all stay in the five boroughs.

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The Metropolitan Complex is a Dublin-based project by Sarah Pierce. It organizes a social practice around a range of activities such as exhibitions, talks and publications. These structures often open up to the personal and the incidental.

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Cover
Rachel Urkowitz (front)
Gareth James (back)

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