Being Curated

Dan Fox invited eight artists and artist groups to reflect on their relationships to curators and curatorial discourse. Alongside responses from Ed Atkins, Marc Camille Chaimowicz, Nick Mauss, Tom Nicholson, Paulina Olowska, Slavs and Tatars and W.A.G.E., Daniel Buren reassesses his 1972 statement 'Exhibiting Exhibitions'
can't help but shake the feeling that we are all - every single one of us, from
teacher to trapeze artist, financier to filmmaker - in the service industry. So
instead of a puerile pitting of the curator versus the artist or vice versa, we
believe it would be better to ask: 'Service to whom? To what?' For Slavs and
Tatars, the service is to our region, Eurasia; to the public; to each other. But it
is also, crucially, to the integrity of the commission and idea behind a project.
Most of our work exists largely thanks to the commission of the curator and
the accompanying institutions. Given the collective nature of our practice, we
look to curators as we do to academics, gallerists and installation crews among
others, as integral partners in an almost alchemical process, that allows for a
series of thoughts to resonate spatially, formally, intellectually and affectively.

Slavs and Tatars' 'Behind Reason' is on view at the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart,
Germany, until 5th May, and their 'Friendship of Nations Polish Shi'ite
Showbiz' opens at Presentation House, Vancouver, Canada, on 12th April and
runs to 26th May.

W.A.G.E.

W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the General Economy) was founded by a
group of artists, performers and independent curators who were brought
together by a common sense of institutional exploitation. Independent
curators — along with other cultural producers — provide a workforce
within a multi-billion dollar industry from which others profit greatly. Like
artists and performers, independent curators are often not considered as
wage labour or subcontracted labourers, and relegated to fee categories
that bear no compensatory relationship to the work we’re asked to provide.

Last year, W.A.G.E. was invited by Tirzad Zolghadr to present a
workshop with his graduate students at the Center for Curatorial Studies
at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson. Together with the class, we made
a list of curatorial responsibilities and duties:

- Research and development: seeing exhibitions, archival research,
  reading, email correspondence, studio visits and site visits.
- Conceptualizing an exhibition: proposal writing and commissioning art
  works, as well as working with artists to produce them.
- Fundraising: maintaining or cultivating donor relations, both socially
  and through submitting written proposals.
- Legalities: facilitating permissions, loans, insurance, contracts and visas.
- Mounting an exhibition: overseeing exhibition design and architecture
  with fabricators, writing and preparing wall texts and labels, organizing
  public programming, public relations, essay writing and catalogue design
  for publication.
- Ongoing administration: oversight, invoicing, designing and maintaining
  budgets, arranging shipping and managing labour from installation to
de-installation.

If independent curators complete even half of the work on this list, then
curatorial fees are symbolic figures. Since we have accounted for the actual
labour being performed — the kind of labour that in any other context
would be remunerated unless it were an unpaid internship — we are able
to quantify and value it in terms of real wages. This should be done either
in relation to other comparable forms of labour, or it could be a wage or fee
calibrated to the cost of living.

The rise of the independent curator has an impact upon artists
because it represents another mouth to feed from exhibition budgets. If
artists and curators are pitted against each other in the battle for compen-
sation, we have been divided; and if curators don’t support artists by writ-
ing equitable artist fees into their budgets, we will have been conquered by
a system that inherently denies the value of all cultural labour.

W.A.G.E. is an activist group based in New York, USA, that focuses on regulating
the payment of artist fees by nonprofit art institutions, and establishing a
sustainable model for best practices between cultural producers and the
institutions that contract their labour.

Slavs and Tatars
Beyoncé, 2012, installation view as part of Projects
98, Museum of Modern Art, New York