

Rirkrit Tiravanija : *Ne Travaillez Jamais*

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Rirkrit TIRAVANIJA: *Ne Travaillez Jamais*

Nadja SAYEJ

Just before New York-based artist Rirkrit Tiravanija takes a hiatus from the art world, he has to have one last show in a gallery - one that rejects the gallery. A brick wall seals off the doorway that can better be seen as a jarring refusal of spectatorship that first confuses, shocks and dismisses before shyly inviting the curious to wallow in it's meaning more.

Sure, blocking off the doorway to an art gallery with bricks is no new idea. Tiravanija is not the first, and probably won't be the last to do this. His *Ne Travaillez Jamais* (which means "never work") calls to mind Robert Barry's *Closed Gallery* from 1969, where he locked the gallery and handed out copies of an ardent manifesto while stomping around the neighborhood. Or maybe Santiago Sierra's 2003 blocked entranceway to the Spanish pavilion of the Venice Biennale with cinder blocks. In all cases here, there is an outright rejection of the gallery which then, at its lack of lush and prosaic gain, becomes the sculpture.

So why would Tiravanija want to reject the gallery? It's especially strange since his past work used lofty and gregarious atmospheres as the basis for his exhibitions. Take *Untitled 1999* (Tomorrow can shut up and go away), for example, which was an installation open 24-hour a day at Gavin Brown's Enterprise in New York City that moved his whole apartment - refrigerator, TV and

shower—into the gallery for almost five months. In referring to Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics in another piece as well, Tiravanija cooked Thai curry for his audience in *Untitled 1992* (Free) at 303 Gallery. Here we see he uses the audience as a tool in the work itself, if not as the product, as the process.

As more than just an institutional critique, *Ne Travaillez Jamais* holds a fixed stare awaiting a conclusion. And that's because, his whole time, Tiravanija has kept a piece within the cavernous gallery space, having us know something else is in there—but us not knowing what. (Not to worry, there will be a wall-smashing ceremony for the closing in September, and just like a piñata, we will see what kind of candy is inside). Though there could very well be nothing inside, Tiravanija has managed to grasp the intangible, and plant it in our minds if only for a moment. With its ping-pong play between presence and absence, here we find a paradox that dimly mirrors an equally perplexing quote by Jacques Lacan: "Love is giving something you don't have to someone who doesn't exist."¹ ←

Rirkrit Tiravanija: *Ne Travaillez Jamais*
Ontario College of Art and Design's
Professional Gallery, Toronto
April 5 to September 7, 2007

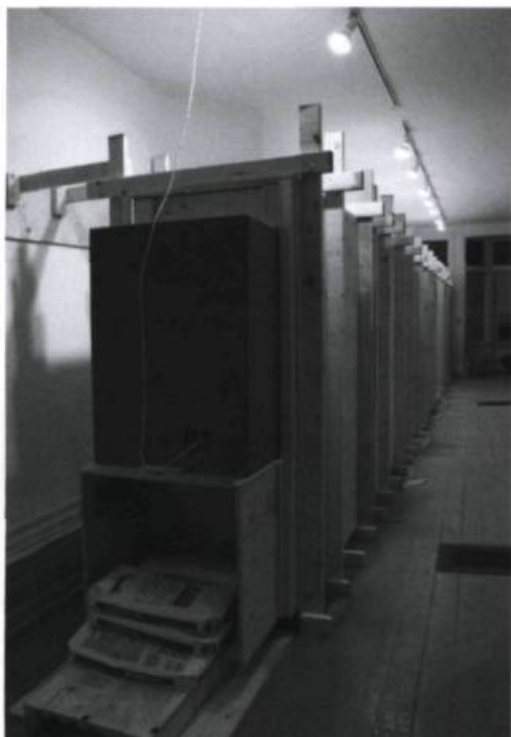
Nadja SAYEJ writes mostly for *The Globe and Mail* in Toronto.

NOTE

1. http://www.katefrank.com/KateFrank/publications_files/identity.html



Rirkrit TIRAVANIJA,
Ne Travaillez Jamais,
2007. 80 x 72 inches.
Photo: Sarah Mulholland.
Courtesy of OCAD.



Nestor KRÜGER,
Monophonic, 2007.
Plywood, spruce
framing, speaker unit,
construction remnants,
carpet, gallery furniture,
etc. 11.5 x 2.2 x .914
meters. Interior of
Goodwater showing
corridor construction,
construction remnants,
etc. Photo courtesy
Goodwater, Toronto.

"own" from the Goodwater gallery. So, having taken up the two-in-one call, having made my way to the point where I am suspended on the threshold (inside but not quite inside 234 Queen Street East), I can only wait for it: not simply for the sound, the monodic blast, in this case, of a single trumpet—as one might, before the wall of Jericho—but its address.⁴ Here, in the *passing* of a divided/displaced partition, one must await a likewise divided address: the destiny—albeit a destiny that has no proper destination—of sound. ←

Nestor Krüger, *Monophonic*
Goodwater, Toronto
January 26–March 10, 2007

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NOTES

1. On the Goodwater website, the exhibition is titled *Monophonic*. There, all of the text has been reversed out of a black rectangle set in what appears to be a field or ground derived from a sheet of construction-grade plywood. As well, this text block has been inverted, as if reflected in a mirror. The reason for the inversion is simple: the Goodwater shingle, which includes information on the current exhibition, had been applied to the window glazing during the installation of Krüger's show. Late in the proceedings, when a decision was made to cover the windows with plywood, the shingle/announcement was of course obscured. Rather than relocating the sign,

Krüger and Goodman seized the opportunity to capitalize on the unanticipated negation of the names of both the gallery and the exhibiting artist, as well as the dates of the exhibition and its proper title. Thus, the image on the website merely reproduces the "reversed" shingle as seen from inside the gallery.

2. On the anal zone and its relation to privatization and sublimation, see Guy Hocquenghem, "Family, Capitalism, Arus," *Semiotext(e)*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1977, pp 149–158. Right from the start, before one could set a foot in the door, the homonymic displacement—"hear" for the deictic "here"—alerted the viewer to the issue of the ear (the labyrinth that includes the cochlea of the internal ear) and thus to the question of how the work might stand or fall to/before a certain notion of the audition. Recall also, that it was Freud who underscores the openness of the ear, informing us that it is the one organ that the child cannot close.
3. The speaker/cabinet assembly was mounted on a track so that it could be pushed out into the gallery space proper, allowing viewers to examine the "exterior" of the construction. Once on the other side of this rolling plug, one was confronted with a more or less empty space. Aside from the rather sparse gallery furnishings, the only other stuff on view was the neatly stacked off-cuts from the construction of the corridor, a set of steel security bars (removed, I suppose, from the front window), the original front door, and three rolls of industrial carpet. Apparently, at one point Krüger had intended to insulate the exterior surfaces of the structure with the carpet in an attempt to damp down (restrict, contain, muzzle, delay), to some degree, the projected address of each sound-event.
4. The actual instrument employed was a bass trombone. Krüger had engaged Paul O'Brien to play one sustained note from as far down the diatonic scale as possible, the result sounding much like a fog horn. I should make it clear that the monodic blast from the trombone that I focus on here was only one of any number of sound-effects or sound-interludes projected into the corridor. As Krüger explained to me, he had left it up to Goodman to "play whatever he liked" over the course of the exhibition. If I have restricted my interest to the one sound—that of the "trumpet"—it was not only to acknowledge the material conditions of this particular address as having been "undivided" or "monophonic" but to draw attention to what might be at stake in such a presentation: an assault on the walls of the hall as well as on the "walls" of the ear, that is to say, the body that attends to the event. A question, then, of partitions and their collapse; hence, the reference to the wall of Jericho: "So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city." *Joshua*, 6:20.