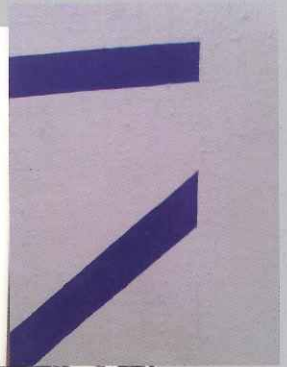


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# Archives With and Without Forms

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“Anarchism Without Adjectives. On the Work of D’Arcangelo, 1975 - 1979”

CAC Brétigny, Brétigny s/Orge

June 19 – July 30, 2011

“The Experimental Impulse”

REDCAT, Los Angeles

November 18, 2011 – January 15, 2012

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On a beautiful Sunday morning in June, I stepped onto a bus headed for the Brétigny contemporary art center (CAC Brétigny) located in the southern suburb of Paris. I was on my way to the opening of the exhibition “Anarchisme sans adjectif” [*Anarchism Without Adjectives*] – subtitled “Sur le travail de l’artiste Chris D’Arcangelo (1975-1979)” [*On the work of the artist Chris D’Arcangelo (1975-1979)*]. Upon entering the CAC, which consists of just one space, all I saw were tables; of which one had video monitors on it. The rest of the room was relatively empty. The exhibition, conceived by Dean Inkster and Sébastien Pluot, in collaboration with Pierre Bal-Blanc for the French edition,<sup>1</sup> revolved around a series of videotaped individual interviews (with Stephen Antonakos, Benjamin Buchloh, Daniel Buren, Ben Kinmont, Peter Nadin, Naomi Spector and Lawrence Weiner), and on material relating to D’Arcangelo and the archives. When I got over my momentary disappointment, I understood that with the exception of the documents placed on one of the two tables – magazine articles, reference materials, cardboard invitations – most of the documentation on D’Arcangelo’s work was not in the exhibit. Indeed, he was evoked solely through a carefully choreographed set of video documentations, whose filming had followed a strict protocol.

Very few people in France had ever heard of D’Arcangelo<sup>2</sup> before this exhibition. D’Arcangelo, who died in 1979 at the age of 24, had a profound impact on many artists and theorists concerned with institutional critique, figures such as Buren (D’Arcangelo had been Buren’s assistant), Buchloh, Louise Lawler and others. In the 1990s, students at the *Institut des hautes études en art plastique* (a brief experimental project for artists founded by Sarkis, Pontus Hulten and Buren), listened to Buren speak about D’Arcangelo with great respect. One such student, Dean Inkster, began to develop a real interest in the artist, and embarked on a long journey that would eventually become the D’Arcangelo retrospective.

1 The second showing of the exhibition took place at Artists Space in New York (September 11 – October 16, 2011).

2 See Andrea Miller-Keller, “Le musée comme œuvre et artéfact,” *Les Cahiers du musée d’art moderne*, Special Issue : L’art contemporain et le musée, (1989). *Documents sur l’art*, no. 12, (2000).

Interview with Daniel Buren by Dean Inkster and Sébastien Pluot, Varennes Jarcy, January 2006, still



D’Arcangelo’s radical actions attempted to challenge the hierarchy of values underlying all forms of production by placing them in the art field. In one of several related actions, he chained and handcuffed himself to the doors of a New York museum. In another action, with Peter Nadin, he transformed the contractualized construction work they had been doing into an artwork. He sold apples in a gallery during the opening of a group exhibition in which he had been initially invited to participate, but was then uninvited from. Whether performance art or transformation of private space, his work, with the exception of a few graphic pieces, was in essence ephemeral and, therefore, a retrospective would necessarily be an archival endeavor. Since he couldn’t use original documents, Inkster came up with the idea of producing a new archive of specially commissioned video interviews and, to that end, he and art historian Pluot created a special apparatus. In 2009 however, Inkster learned that he would not have the authorization to reproduce the documents from the Fales Library and Special Collections of New York University (where D’Arcangelo’s archives have been since being donated by Cathy Weiner and the D’Arcangelo Partnership). The exhibition faced a dual, and seemingly insurmountable challenge: how to give an accurate account of the artist’s work by means of the archival documents, and how to work with the prohibition to reproduce those documents, even in video form. The protocol for the production of the six videos shown individually on six different monitors, which were made for the retrospective consisted in the use of two fixed cameras: one filming the person opposite a workspace, and the other filming from above. Both films alternate shots of faces with shots of hands holding documents, the latter serving to

punctuate speech with movement. The voices of the curators/interviewers are never heard, as all questions have been edited out in an attempt to eliminate the friendly repartee common in most filmed conversations. Each shot defines the “documentary space,” and it is precisely by means of this space that the resulting videos create an oral archive of sorts.

The second version of the exhibition was held at Artists Space several months later. That version made use of the same curatorial method, and it included an homage to D’Arcangelo by Christopher Williams entitled *Bouquet for Bas Jan Ader and Christopher D’Arcangelo* (1991). On this occasion though, the context for the exhibition was very different. While the CAC is a public art center located in the middle of a Parisian suburb, Artists Space is a privately and publicly funded exhibition space in the heart of Manhattan’s Soho district. Also, this latter version of the exhibition had to be approved by D’Arcangelo’s estate, which had decided to organize an exhibition entitled *Homage* featuring a selection of D’Arcangelo’s documents at the Albus Greenspon Gallery at the same time.

In mid-October the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York was in full swing. Holland Cotter writing in *The New York Times*,<sup>3</sup> ventured a parallel: “In ways similar to the youthful politics of Occupy Wall Street, a short walk from SoHo, D’Arcangelo’s anarchic art was about social interaction and community, and so is his retrospective”. Indeed, D’Arcangelo’s attitude towards institutions, particularly Artists Space, had a good deal in common with the Occupy Wall Street movement. In 1978, D’Arcangelo literally had his name removed from documents pertaining to a group exhibition he had participated in along with Lawler, Adrian Piper and Cindy Sherman. It was his way of protesting the fact that Artists Space was not a space genuinely run by artists. The issues addressed by OWS collided with the D’Arcangelo exhibition. At one point, Artists Space was briefly occupied by a group, that went on to have film screenings and debates. The following comment appeared on the groups blog “*Take Artists Space*”: “God wants Christopher D’Arcangelo to stay with us forever; he would stay far away from all this.”

Quite by chance, then, this second version of the exhibition was caught up in the context surrounding OWS. But the discussions on Artist Space’s institutional communication that had initially inspired D’Arcangelo’s actions were, it would appear, sadly missing.

Late last November, I was in Los Angeles. After a few exhausting days spent running around the city to see some of the *Pacific Standard Time* exhibitions, I finally arrived at the REDCAT art center. The space is a rather simple, single room on the ground floor of the vast Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater designed by Frank Gehry. PST’s aim was to offer new insights into the history of art made in California between 1945 and 1980, by means of a series of exhibitions on an unprecedented scale (as more than 100 exhibitions were

3 *The New York Times*, October 13, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/14/arts/design/anarchism-without-adjectives-on-the-work-of-christopherdarcangelo-1975-1979.html>

to be organized over a six-month period with a budget of 10.5 million dollars from the Getty Research Institute). The second aim was to be part of the larger operation, which was to give the city a new image. Organized in conjunction with CalArts, *The Experimental Impulse* exhibition held at REDCAT, surprised me in its radical approach to retrospective-making. Unlike other exhibitions which feature both well-known and forgotten artists, creating categories around genre, origin or medium, *The Experimental Impulse* featured experiments in the making and exhibiting of art to show the research carried out by CalArts students in the last four years.

The curators of the exhibition, Thomas Lawson and Aram Moshayedi and the participants in the CalArts seminar, raised a new question: How does one convey the history of experimentation in L.A. after 1965 in an experimental fashion? The idea was to reveal a heterogeneous range of elements rather than fabricate a wholly positivist, linear, progressive and individualistic history, as it appears PST would have preferred. Instead, the curators attempted to “bridge [...] the gap between these histories and more recent approaches to art making.”<sup>4</sup> To that end, they created a film, sound, photography, and text archive that could be accessed through either website or through consultation apparatuses that were in the exhibition space, and which were organised around a specific set design.

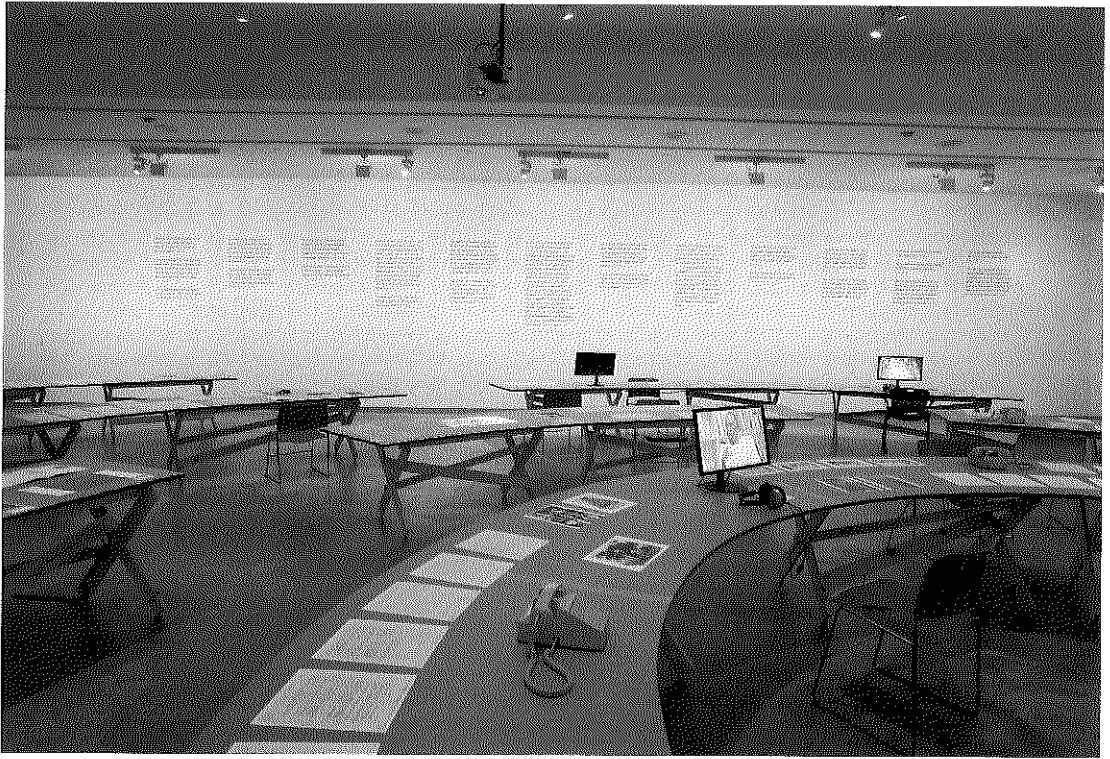
This catalogue, unlike the standard print catalogues used for PST exhibitions, is a database consisting of documents that were in the show and that can be interspersed by users with any related documents. The database, housed on the website of *East of Borneo*, “a collaborative art journal and multimedia archive that publishes a selection of commissioned essays, documentation, interviews and research materials related to the process of organizing *The Experimental Impulse*.”<sup>5</sup>

The freely available documents on the website allow the information to circulate beyond the exhibition space. On the walls of the gallery space were banners bearing quotes; information specifying who made the statements and when, could be found on captions scattered throughout the space, thus forcing the viewer to read the quotes with no sense of history or authorship. The exhibition also included oversized posters of intellectuals and philosophers—figures like Marcuse, McLuhan, and a number of French theorists—in a concentric pattern; those posters were created in one of the CalArts courses. “They are recreations of the original posters that were designed in 1969 by Maurice Stein, the first dean of CalArts school of critical studies.”

In collecting and producing the documentation featured in the exhibition, emphasis was placed on the context and the networks in existence during the period addressed from a point of view, which is not only institutional. This platform is the first form of experimentation. The second idea of the experiment is mostly presented in the form of consultation materials found by CalArts students

4 Presentation on the site of REDCAT.

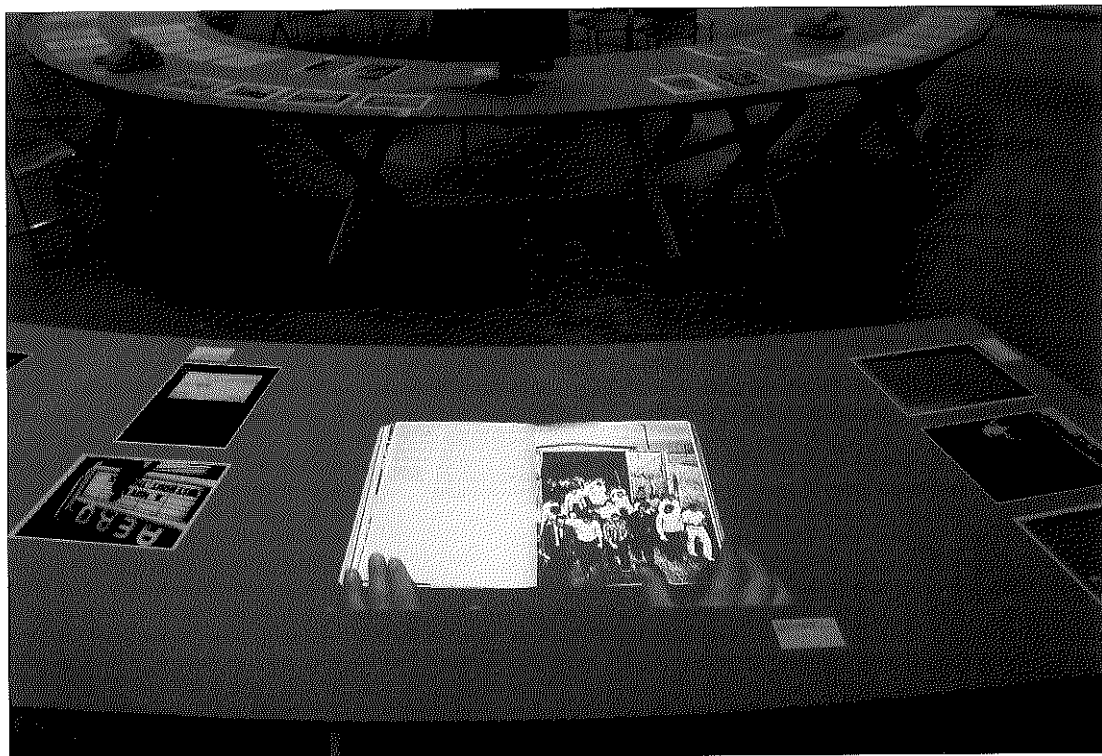
5 See [www.eastofborneo.org](http://www.eastofborneo.org)



in the seminar “The Experimental Impulse.” Predictably, these materials reflect the pedagogical experiments that were taking place at CalArts during the 1970s and 1980s. To present these experiments, the exhibition makes use of a number of different “low-tech” forms in order to reflect the nature of the documents being exhibited. For example, there are old-fashioned telephone receivers for listening back to audio interviews, old video projectors, posters, etc. These devices stand in contrast to the slightly interactive ones often found in museums. A digital moving image projected downward onto a display table of a print publication being flipped through, is one example. Unlike most exhibitions of student work, “The Experimental Impulse” offers a model of experimental pedagogy.

“The Experimental Impulse,” 2011, installation view at REDCAT, Los Angeles

Although the nature and origin of the documents in the two exhibitions differ, both incite reflection on use value by means of their forms of presentation. In many museum exhibitions, documents are presented as annexes of a sort, as a means to shed light on the context in which the works were produced: letters, research notes, posters, etc. Often their materiality is secondary to their content. What is the critical use of such documents? Does the way in which they are displayed encourage questioning of the circulation and communication of knowledge? How? Could a critical use of the documents by means of a specific form of display lead to an interrogation of present situations, of underlying institutional logics, and of the paradigms of the disciplines related to history with



*The Experimental Impulse*, 2011, installation view at REDCAT, Los Angeles

particular emphasis on the history of art? The parallel between the two exhibitions may very well help us answer these questions.

Of necessity or by choice, both exhibitions work only via the reproduction of documents, and they do so in an experimental manner. One exhibition is video-based, and its protocol and work plan make use of interviews and a series of shots to display the documents in question. The other makes use of the Internet and devices for consultation and participation in the construction of the archive. The premise of the REDCAT exhibition is more radical, as it questions from the very start the originality of the documents. At a time when the free circulation of information is being hindered on the Internet (the closure of downloading sites, the creation of control organizations in the United States, the threats to information sites such as WikiLeaks, etc.) and in the art world (due to its ultra-professionalization), this exhibition explores the free circulation of documents and their accessibility for all types of research.

By default, the curators of “Anarchism Without Adjectives” chose to “reflect” D’Arcangelo’s withdrawal strategies. But they didn’t go so far as to interpret his questioning of the hierarchies of values of cultural production, which would mean questioning the value of documents in the field of art by making them public. In the end, the presentation of the documents in “The Experimental Impulse” would appear more critically effective. It also levels a critique of PST, which is responsible for the exhibition, by reversing the process

for the construction of its vast retrospective on California art, created by historians doing research on the documents at the Getty Research Institute.

“What scares people? Precisely the fact that eliminating criteria of distinction causes the foundation of values to collapse. And in Chris [D’Arcangelo]’s case, that’s an unprecedented radicalization of the Duchampian principle,” says Benjamin Buchloh in one of the videos in “*Anarchisme sans objectifs*.” And that’s precisely the risk that the curators of REDCAT took with the powerful PST exhibition-producing machine, and they did so with students to boot. *Traduit de l’anglais par Jane Brodie*

## The Land Farms the Farmer and the Mind

*Mathieu Malouf*

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Peter Nadin, “First Mark”  
Gavin Brown’s Enterprise, New York  
June 29 – July 30, 2011

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“...passionate bloom”  
—James Broughton, *The Gardener of Eden*

In a recent profile about his return to the art world in *T Magazine*, Peter Nadin explained that while his organic carrots are not art per se, they are still the result of an artistic process. Already an artist and a poet in New York during the 1980s, Nadin became an artist-farmer in 1992 after a nervous breakdown drove him away from the city. In the Catskills he founded Old Field Farm, with the mission of “exploring the mutual benefits of art and agriculture” and “unlearning” to paint. During the twenty years that have since passed, he raised piglets, produced small batches of organic vegetables and meat exclusively distributed to a farmer’s market and a restaurant in the West Village, hardly exhibiting until *First Mark*, a monumental comeback exhibition at Gavin Brown’s Enterprise last summer. Nadin’s art has always been about revealing what he calls “the underlying experience of consciousness,” and while this once took the form of very late, crusty 1980s Schnabel-esque neo-surrealist paintings that relied on industrially-produced materials like oil paint and brushes, the operation of an art studio on the farm has seen the latter replaced by more sustainable, locally-grown options like cashmere wool, bee propolis, wax, and honey. Referred to as “reliquary” by Nadin in statements, these fragments of the landscape used as art materials are said to activate an unmediated experience of the artist’s inner being. Thanks to this transubstantiation, experiencing Nadin’s art or eating food from his farm (for sale in hand-labeled jars at the back of Gavin Brown’s during the show) means eating his soul.