

## Dieter Lesage: A Portrait of the Artist as a Researcher

You're an artist and that means: you're a dreamer, you're a clown. That is what some people think. It's a great excuse for not paying any attention to all the thoughts you have. So what happens is that you, as an artist, put ideas into projects that others will show in their museum, in their Kunsthalle, in their exhibition space, in their gallery. So you are a thinker. You develop reflections nobody really cares about. You take intellectual risks. You speculate about artistic problems, you critically kick ass. You're a transcender. You cannot put all your research efforts into one kind of artistic problems. So you interdisciplinaryize your reflection. You link the reflections you make. You would say it differently. I know. You say you work within the framework of cultural studies. Within which all over the world you have many buddies. You are a video maker, but also a writer. You have a magazine, you're an editor, but you also organize conferences. You make videos of interviews with intellectuals. You organize a conference when you present a journal, you insert video stills of interviews with intellectuals in your journal, you organize conferences and you're the host. You're part of this little think tank, you walk around at your conference, you talk to people and ask if they want to contribute to your reader, you're an editor and co-editor, you're a research coordinator and co-coordinator, you co-edit and coordinate all the time. You want your readers to attend your lectures, you want your conference participants to read your texts, you invite those who contribute to your reader to come to your conference, you make installations with interview videos. You meet people in order to interview them and you interview people in order to meet them. You distribute flyers announcing your conference in the bars near the skyscrapers where you meet people for an interview. You buy second-hand books on flea markets, you distribute flyers announcing your conference in the bar next to the Academy where you meet a DJ who's distributing flyers too, and you talk to her about a project that one day you might work on together. You make photographs of the library you made from the books you bought at the flea market, you liberate your continent from its philosophical prejudices, you publish the photographs in a publication and you're a speaker at a conference to which you invite people who wrote for your journal. You invite other speakers to speak after you, you are a master of ceremony and someone else is the speaker, you welcome the people who came to the conference, you introduce people to one another. You're making art and you're doing research, your research is practice-based and your practice is research-driven. You're doing research on the concept of artistic research, you aren't an artist yourself, they say, but yes you are. You make books that bear your name, you send your books to people who write, you quote their books and they quote you, you write about them and they about you. You are everywhere and you make people wonder where you are. You are abroad, you're working on one of your laptops, you're getting back to all your e-mail conversations, you're updating people on your research projects, you're doing research projects all the time. You buy flight tickets on the web, you call for a cab, you wear your excess baggage full of research documents from the cab to the plane. You work in different places. You move. You move from one workshop to another, from one conference to another. You take another cab, it takes hours to find your place in Lissabon. You prepare a publication and you negotiate with the layouter to have your text printed the way you want it. You distribute flyers announcing the presentation of the publication in a theater where you attend a performance, you distribute flyers announcing a performance for which you were the dramaturge at the presentation of the publication in a bookshop, you announce another presentation of the same publication in another bookshop, you thank people for being there, you introduce people you interviewed to one another, you invite them to come to the performance. You organize exhibitions, you invite people to present their work, you work with people on the presentation, you explain the curatorial concept of the exhibition in an announcement for the media. You publish in order not to perish and you perish for having published too much. You write new stuff and you rewrite old stuff. You watch the news. You're doing research on the blues. You're peer reviewing for journals and your journal is peer-reviewed. You're an artist and that means it would be nice to get some understanding for the specific kind of research you're involved in. You write for subsidies, you apply for research grants, and in every commission over and over again there are these academics who don't understand a thing about artistic research. You organize dinner for people you introduce to one another, you discuss research plans over dinner. You ask people to contribute to your catalogue, you tell them how you work, you show them all. You explain them the basic facts of an artist's life. That you are an artist and that it means: you're a dreamer, you're a clown. That is what some of these people think. It's a great excuse for not paying attention to all the thoughts you have. So what happens is that you, as an artist, put ideas into projects that others will show in their museum, in their Kunsthalle, in their exhibition space, in their gallery. So you are a thinker. You develop reflections nobody really cares about. You take intellectual risks. You speculate about artistic problems, you critically kick ass. You're a transcender. You cannot put all your research efforts into one kind of artistic problems. So you interdisciplinaryize your reflection. You link the reflections you make. I would say it differently. You know. I say your work is characterized by transdisciplinarity. That it is impressive by its methodological variety. You remix the work of others, but you also remix your own work. You're very profound but you have a vulgar side too that indulges in scatological remarks. Just kidding. You distribute texts to the visitors of your exhibitions. You consider exhibitions as an excuse for a publication — kidding again — you even consider an exhibition in itself as a publication, you

consider every work of art as a publication. You curate an exhibition: it's like editing a book. You co-curate an exhibition: it's like co-editing a book. You participate in a group exhibition: it's like publishing an article. You participate as a member of a collective in a group exhibition: it's like co-authoring an article. You make a solo exhibition, hey, it's like publishing a monograph. You make a solo exhibition at Tate Modern: it's like publishing a monograph at Oxford University Press. There's got to be some method in this mess. So let's be more specific. You participate in a group exhibition at Tate Modern: it's like publishing an article in an A-journal. You participate as a member of a collective in a group exhibition at Tate Modern: it's like publishing a co-authored article in an A-journal. You curate a group exhibition at Tate Modern: it's like editing an issue of an A-journal. You co-curate a group exhibition at Tate Modern: it's like co-editing an issue of an A-journal. You are a member of the advisory commission for a group exhibition at Tate Modern: it's like being a peer reviewer of an A-journal. You are the director of Tate Modern: it's like being the editor-in-chief of an A-journal. You have a solo exhibition at Tate Modern: it's almost like presenting and defending a Ph.D. To be published at Oxford University Press. Still what a mess. What about the B? If you've got an A, you've got to have a B too. You participate in a group exhibition at Whitechapel: it's like publishing an article in a B-journal. You participate as a member of a collective in a group exhibition at Whitechapel: it's like publishing a co-authored article in a B-journal. You curate a group exhibition at Whitechapel: it's like editing an issue of a B-journal. You co-curate a group exhibition at Whitechapel: it's like co-editing an issue of a B-journal. You are a member of the advisory commission for a group exhibition at Whitechapel: it's like being a peer reviewer of a B-journal. You are the director of Whitechapel: it's like being the editor-in-chief of a B-journal. And I don't mean to be negative about the B, you know what I'm saying? Coz' there's lots of them journals that aren't even A, B or C, dig it? Then to have a solo exhibition at Whitechapel is almost like presenting and defending an M.F.A. To be published by Edinburgh University Press. It's like a real fucking publication, man. It ain't an A, it's a B, but it counts. It counts a lot, if you compare it to an exhibition in the gallery of your niece. Coz' that gallery doesn't even have a C, if you know what I mean. It's just a gallery, and it's your niece, so she's much too close to be a peer and all. That's what becoming academic is all about. That you have those people who are called peers and who are totally objective and who know the shit and who can determine if your artwork and your artistic research meet all the scientific standards and all. And so you'd better thank God for peers who are objective and scientific and neutral and anonymous. And so you'd better thank God for the University who helps you to find peers who are objective and scientific and neutral and anonymous and competent. Coz' the University academizes you, with the help of God Almighty. You're stubborn but God is patient. So slowly you're getting academized. The University academizes you and your Academy is being academized. So you'd better praise the Lord for all the good people at Research & Development. So thank you God for the R&D parties to which you are invited now, and who redeem you for all the years that you've been listening too much to sinful R&B. Now you go to parties with objective music, neutral drinks, and scientific conversations, in order to meet anonymous people. Now you're part of this little think tank, this artistic platform, this network, this research group, so you walk around at the parties of R&D, and offer validated cocktails to the members of your peer group. But the party is just so fucking boring that you're getting drunk. You're getting provocative, you're using unacademic language. You're pointing at the president of the research commission. You're shouting, you're getting loud. You're much too loud man. People are getting embarrassed. And while they're looking away, sipping at their Bama on the Beach, you tell them with a grim smile on your face: I'm an artist and that means: I'm a dreamer, I'm a clown. That is what some of you guys think. It's a great excuse for not paying any shitty attention to all the thoughts I have. So what happens is that I, as a fucking artist, put fucking ideas into fucking projects that others will show in their fucking museum, in their shitty Kunsthalle, in their sexhibition space, in their gutter gallery. So I am a thinker. I develop reflections none of you really cares about. I take intellectual risks. I speculate about artistic problems, I critically kick ass. I'm a transcender. I cannot put all my research efforts into one kind of artistic problems. So I interdisciplinarize my reflection. I link the reflections I make. You would say it differently. I know. You say I don't have a method. You say I mix things up. While mixing is my method. Do I tell you how to construct a machine? No. So don't tell me how to work as an artist. Coz' you don't have a clue. Don't you tell me that I should publish, that I should publish more, that I should publish there, or publish then. I publish where I want, when I want and how I want. Don't tell me that meaning only appears in text. Don't tell me that without a written text on my work, my work doesn't have any meaning. Words don't have the monopoly of meaning, you know what I'm saying? Images can speak. So I give you images, and you give me that fucking doctorate. Coz' my images develop hypotheses. My images ask questions. My images write history. My images interpret and reinterpret history. My images defend propositions. My images refute arguments. My images criticize misconceptions. My images are comments. My images are theses. My images speak as much as words can speak. And therefore to all those who speak in images, I say: rize! Rize against the image of the artist as a dreamer. Rize against the image of the artist as a clown. Rize against what some people think. And make them pay attention to all the thoughts you have. But continue to develop your thoughts your way. Beyond the Academy.

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