

**Panel discussion at Topshop
26.09.04 in Berlin:**

**MASS-PRODUCT VS UNICAT
Originality through reproduction?**

PARTICIPANTS:

Moderator:

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Beate Rätz
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A.K.: May I introduce the panel:

Jeannette Stoschek has been involved with reproduced art for many years. She has worked in Rome, Stuttgart and Düsseldorf and since 2001 she has been a researcher in the Graphic Collection at the Museum of Visual Arts in Leipzig (Museum der bildenden Künste, www.mdbk.de). She has published a number of papers, covering topics such as contemporary photography. Particularly apposite for our discussion today is her article entitled "the beginnings of reproduced art and the vexatious search for the original" (Anfänge der vervielfältigten Kunst und die leidige Frage nach dem Original). That's obviously relevant for us.

Beate Rätz is a market researcher in Berlin. She studied European Ethnology and currently engages in qualitative market research. Not abstract statistical research, but rather, market research on real people with real products that they could prospectively purchase.

Dieter Daniels is a Professor in Art History and Media Theory at the Academy of Visual Arts, Leipzig (Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst, www.hgb-leipzig.de). To anyone who has immersed themselves in media art and the history of media in the German speaking world, Dieter Daniels' name will not be unfamiliar. He has published extensively, in particular on the history of the internet, on radio and on fluxus. In short, art in conjunction with media in the broadest sense. He has also published a not insignificant book on Duchamp, something that will also be of interest to us in this context. In the field of practice, he has been involved in the establishment of the video collection of the ZKM Centre for Arts and Media from 1991-1993 (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, www.zkm.de).

There are here two fields of enquiry in which we will move. The first one is the model of production that underlies this place, in connection with the various objects that will be copied and sold. This is a complex that includes the general economic context in which this place is situated and also the not always clear distinction between artistic and designer production. How this functions and what it means as a statement here in this location is one of the topics which we will discuss.

The other field of enquiry is that of the mass product and the unique object, which is sometimes but not always the question of the mass product and the original. This is a theme that has a notorious history, for it contains the question of the Unicum and its reproducibility, and it is with this point that we would like to begin.

It has just been said during the preliminary discussion that when one goes through the exhibition and looks around, one thinks "well that has all surely got a history of its own". It's true, this project embodies an attempt that has been made repeatedly. This project poses a question that is not just 50 years old, but in reality much older. We will begin this discussion with an attempt to review the development of the question of the original and the mass product with its economic and political ensnarements in the art context and elsewhere.

I would like to therefore start with Jeannette Stoschek, and begin by looking back to the 15th Century. The artist in the middle ages was rather more like an artisan: a copyist or a designer. They were not yet someone who could use their name like a brand (as is today done by, for example, Jeff Koons). The name as brand is a development that first appears with the Renaissance; the period in which the artist completes a transformation of role, and emerges as

an individual. The artist no longer works merely as a craftsman, but rather as an inventor, a creator on par with a scientist. It's the innovation, the invention and the concept that separates the artist from a specialised technician who can paint just as well. Here emerges the modern type of artist, who we refer to, when we today use the word "artist".

At approximately the same time another transformation occurred that affected both artist and media, namely, printing. Techniques of printing were discovered and precisely at this moment a question can be posed that still has relevance as a problem today: what is the relationship between the original that an artist-as-genius has produced, and reproducibility? The medieval answer to this question displayed a totally different attitude to now or even a hundred years ago.

J.S.: What's interesting is that this period—from the end of the 14th Century through the 15th Century—can be described as a media revolution. This is the time of the invention of the Gutenberg press. In the 14th Century paper was introduced to Europe, and in its wake appear the first wood cuts. We don't know quite when because it wasn't documented. However, we know through descriptions, and in some cases through prohibitions, that playing cards existed. Playing cards were the first mass produced images in the secular realm. The other images belonged to the church: the religious souvenirs, the ikons and the adoration images of saints.

One must imagine it along the following lines: one reproduces images, holy images, that are transferred onto woodcuts and traded without reference to their artistic pretensions but rather as implements of worship. Then all of a sudden, during the course of the 15th Century, the year appears on the prints. In the same period we have the appearance of the first signed sheets, and therefore the first artist's signatures, and with them the first artistic personalities become tangible, personalities such as Martin Schongauer and Albrecht Dürer. Meanwhile, copper plate engraving establishes itself and the medium becomes artistically employed. By this we mean not merely that an image is reissued and reproduced, but that the artist begins to translate original pictorial ideas into engravings and to exploit the copperplate artistically. So although the concept of the original in the sense that we understand it today does not play so large a role in the 15th and 16th Centuries, the role of the artist is changing. Albrecht Dürer is, for example, the first artist to engage in litigation over copyright. He initiated legal proceedings against the copying of his pictures together with his name. The implication being that the copying of his pictures was fine, but only without his signature attached.

A.K.: Perhaps we can pause for a moment there. For me the most interesting thing at the end of the presentation of your text was as follows: "TOPSHOP says: "The mass product and the unique piece collapse together, "cheap and valuable", we want to question the status of the one-of-a-kind and production-in-a-series as two independent principles." It seems the historical origins of this thought lie in the printed image, where the original no longer exists.

J.S.: You mean the unique case. There is always an original.

A.K.: but your argument was that back then neither artists nor public would have posed the question "Is there an original for this print?"

J.S.: The search for the original was relevant insofar as people began in the 15th Century to collect images. For example, people began to collect Schongauer. Schongauer quite consciously decided to produce prints even though he was already a famous painter, and these were the first collectable images.

What is more interesting here is that the potential of an engraving or a woodcut is very high, and was never exhausted. Unfortunately, we do not know in what sort of numbers a run was printed. Even today there are many plates from which one could still print, should one wish. However we would not refer to such a print as an original, but as a reprint. But you wouldn't have posed yourself the question in those days: "is it an original?". People just wanted to have the picture. It was a matter of relative indifference to purchasers whether or not it came directly from Albrecht Dürer or Marc Antonio Raimondi. They were interested in the composition, in the idea, and in any case the origins of an image were often not known. They were also not always traceable, for in meeting demand a great parallel net of printers and publishers had established itself. The labour was divided. For example, there would be one engraver, that is, one artist who had invented a picture, and then a publisher and a network of merchants. Plates would be bought from one publisher by another, and the previous publisher's trademark would be erased and replaced by the new owner's seal. The question of originality as we understand it dates from the 19th Century. In the 19th Century people began to consider the majority of graphic images as worthless, as they were printed in such large runs and underwent so many reproductions. Artists began to limit their editions and intentionally destroy their plates. No one did that in the 15th Century. Today you can still acquire a reprint of a Piranesi or a Dürer from the original plates. The plates still exist. These artists never tried to limit how large their editions should be.

A.K.: The term "originality", which we are here discussing, is a modern invention. I want to return briefly to Rubens and Dürer. One must be clear that printing technologies, and their application and strategic employment, had a special economic meaning. I mean, these were businesses. An artist such as Rubens was a medium sized business and the use of print media was a consciously market oriented, strategic one. Perhaps you [J.S.] can add something here?

J.S.: Dürer certainly worked out that he could make a lot of money with a large edition of engravings, and that these pictures also earned him a broader public than paintings. He would work on a single engraving for up to three months, and the size of a run would be relatively high. Rubens and Raffael had a similar rationale. Artists travelled a lot back then, especially while still being trained. They travelled mostly to Italy in order to see artworks, to study paintings and frescos. With the discovery of printing, an artist can reproduce their own artworks—naturally only in black and white—and thereby market their images. At the same time, it remains possible to trace the images to their source, their original. The innovation of the picture, its marketing and trajectory become important. It is crucial to keep in mind that the artist does not have to go on the road, rather the pictures do it themselves. The pictures of Raffael and Rubens are famous, and every one of us has grown up with them. Their content has endured over centuries partly thanks to the help of printing.

A.K.: So, Rubens's use of printing technology is on the level of contemporary marketing strategies. Durer was always copied and began legal action against it in order to protect his copyright—a concept that didn't previously exist.

J.S.: He simply asserted that he had one. One must ask oneself, how did one protect oneself in this period? He wrote in one of his books: "He who copies me..., him I threaten with the Emperor..."

A.K.: Rubens, on the other hand, produced so many pictures himself that nobody else could cut into the market! He mass produced his pictures. He covered the mass distributed side of the market and at the same time raised the aura of the painted originals. It is a logic that we see in contemporary marketing strategies.

From here we leap across to the modern, and to the question of the original and the reproduction, or multiple exemplars, as the case may be. It's a modern, bourgeoisie art concept that underlies this 'original'.

The modern artist has usually been perceived as a masculine subject, who is capable, on the basis of some inspiration or another, to express himself. This expression is manifested by an object, this most coveted entity of 'the art object', no less, that the artist has brought forth. It's about creativity.

Let us now discuss the art work, its production and marketing. It struck me that, as a gesture of expression [i.e. excretion], Duchamp's choice of a urinal was not entirely inappropriate. Perhaps we will continue in the same vein, as there is to a certain degree another logic heralded by the question of the manufactured artwork.

D.D.: We are talking here about the readymade, the found object. In the USA, it's an everyday expression. For example, when one talks of buying ready made fashion, one means buying clothes "off the rack", or "ready to wear", as opposed to made to measure. In the 1920s, Duchamp selected objects that were industrially manufactured. For example a urinal, or a bottle dryer – the best known pieces – and called them "ready mades". He resituated them in the realm of art, and in so doing he positioned them in relation to other art works. Duchamp exhibited these objects as if they were artworks. I think what Duchamp had in mind was specifically to avoid this notion of "Genius" (as Alexander has described it) and to say: there is in this era of industrialisation, the ongoing mass production of every sort of object, already too many things in the world. Why should I, as an artist, in this world jam packed with wares and goods, add yet more? Is it not enough when I select something from this world, or point to it? It is more an act of selection than an act of creation. Not this torturous expression of the self, rather, taking something that is already there, and diverting the attention of the art public to it. It's from this that the myth of the modern has grown: the act of refusal. And with this, Duchamp has become a model for many other things as well.

I also want to raise the relationship between the readymade and the multiple. They are, in a paradoxical way, related to each other. But one could also say, the multiple is the opposite of the readymade, because the readymade is an object that is already there, and that only has to be selected. The multiple, in contrast, is manufactured as an art object. And although it sometimes looks like an industrial product, it is really only created to serve the purposes of art.

In the case of the ready made, something is just singled out in order that it be reobserved, and its aesthetic qualities—or perhaps even its concealed qualities—be engaged with. For example, take the bottle-dryer [Hedgehog]. It can still be purchased in the same shop in Paris. I bought one in the 1980's for 140 Francs; an astonishing price.

The readymade is therefore a mass produced object that has been isolated from its kind. It is released from the masses, taken off the shelf, and set upon the stage as something unique. The multiple is produced in exactly the opposite way. It is something produced in high numbers by an artist and could potentially end up in a shop, on a shelf. The term "Multiples" covers many objects of the same kind, therefore not just graphics, but also three dimensional objects that can be launched as if they were design products. Correspondingly, the price can decouple itself from the artmarket (TopShop is an instance of this) and approach the normal price of products. In the 1960s the VICE mail order company produced multiples for the first time, and offered them for sale in a supermarket for only 8 Marks.

A.K.: Let's return to the greater framework presented by the times: the 50s and 60s. There's a lot there that is relevant. There is conceptual art, which pretty much does what was done in the Renaissance—in a very different

manner, admittedly. It's enough to produce ideas, then to communicate them and to publicise them. The production of an idea is then no longer dependant on the production of a physical object. Conceptual art took it upon itself to attempt an alternative distribution system. No longer the old routine: I produce something, stick it in a gallery and sell it for a lot of money. Rather one attempted to use fields that had always stood distant from the arts: the public sphere, the radio, television. Even before then, one had the Fluxus movement, which was from inclination similar, although always political, and with a strong tendency towards the left, a resistance movement aimed at the heart of the bourgeoisie ideology of production. It was often said at the time: the production of Art must be able to function differently. It's about democratisation. Democratisation, that is an important key term in the context of the discussion here.

D.D.: Democratisation is something that the participants in TOPSHOP explicitly do not want, if one refers back to the manifesto that we heard at the beginning tonight...

A.K.: Exactly. Let's hold that in the back of our minds.

So, people in the 1960s sought after new forms of articulation, beyond the classical concept of the artwork. Our keywords here are: democratisation, dehierarchisation, demystification. We can add performance art here. Visual art takes up the new categories of the time: the performative, the theatrical. On the one hand in order to be able to speak differently, and on the other hand to undermine and evade the endless production of these unique pieces. Andy Warhol—the Factory—offers us another model of production. A collective production model that follows a predetermined pattern.

D.D.: The continuation (or, if you will, the reversal) of the Duchampian thought runs: how can the multiplication of objects articulate itself in new and various models of production (or art forms).

The pure Ready-made is upended into a new model for the artistic production of objects that are no longer found, but manufactured as artefacts. In the 1960s there were tendencies that appear superficially similar, but in reality were ideological strongly opposed to it. Fluxus, for example, propagated the democratic thought—underlied by a communistic ideology—that there should be art for everyone. There should be art that one can buy for 3 Marks, or \$1.50. Maciunas collected ideas from the Fluxus artists, and then arduously built the products as a sort of one-man factory. He lived in Canal Street in New York, where all these odds and ends shops are, and that provided his raw material.

Warhol is another case entirely. One couldn't exactly accuse him of communist inclinations. He also installed in museums apparently identical copies of known and available products. Of course, you know the Brillo Boxes that look as if they are Brillo Boxes. In reality they are objects made of sheets of wood. The Brillo logo is screen printed onto the wood, but there is nothing inside. They are a pseudo-readymade. At first glance, you cannot tell them apart from the actual product, and you ask yourself, why are these household cleaning products standing inside a museum? In the Factory, these pseudo-products were manufactured by a collective in a manner akin to Warhol's films. Many people participated, but in the end they only served the propogation of the Warhol brand. It was an exercise in branding.

It was exactly this that Fluxus, and above all Maciunas, did not want. The objects were to be sold anonymously. Fluxus failed with the model, for their boxes were simply far to cheap for the art market. They were not collected as art, because no one buys art for three dollars, and as a result they have become with the passing of time very rare. The multiples have been reduced again to occasional, one off objects.

That's what I wanted to add to what Jeannette was saying. The very first wood cut products, playing cards, are today the very rarest. It was these things that there were the very most of, but that nobody had preserved, because they were articles of use. When they playing cards had been worn out, they were simply thrown out, and therefore there are very few of them. What had existed a thousand times has become a unique object. Such processes repeat themselves, and the case of Fluxus is an example of this. Therefore I want to make a pronouncement: guard your TOPSHOP objects well. Buy something here while you still can. Because these objects will not be archived, they won't be preserved in any sort of ingenious storage system. They've been bought by one of you, and you will keep it or throw it away. In that sense they slip through the net of the system, which printing, for instance, conforms to. The concept of the readymade has slowly transformed itself into a new product format. That's indicated by the examples from the 1960s. At this time Duchamp thought to himself: if everybody makes readymades and makes so much money with it, then I can only add to the heap by perverting my good old readymades and turning them into multiples. His own "original" readymades no longer existed, because he hadn't looked after them himself either, as they had only a conceptual value, not a material value. Now he, following the model of his followers, in imitation of the readymades produced a limited edition of multiples in 1963. He didn't buy any bottle dryers, but rather had some built after the model of the original bottle dryer. Regardless of the fact that an "original" bottle dryer didn't actually exist. In a ceramics factory the urinal was reproduced in exactly its original form for an enormous amount of money, as only photos of the first urinal to be exhibited remained. Just imagine: a ceramics factory churns out thousands of urinals a day. Then for one day, production has to be completely halted so that seven urinals can be manufactured in an outdated form. These multiples were eventually sold for some fairly serious money, and with them the cycle closes and perverts itself. Out of the isolated, selected industrial object a new manufacturable industrial object is created, and

it isn't even industrial any more, but rather a limited edition "original".

A.K.: Warhol functioned the other way around. That's a collective context. There is not just one author who slaps a patent on every one of his expressions. It is like here and now. Here is a photocopier. Andy Warhol, back then he was the guy with a screen printer. He was the guy who said: Marilyn Monroe, if I produce that, or you do, or any of my five assistants—who cares!—it's all about the gesture, the habitus. Welcome to pop culture!

J.S.: As a consumer one bought more than that. One didn't just buy Coca Cola, but rather a lifestyle.

B.R.: Did the connection really hold: that one liked Coca Cola and therefore Andy Warhol too?

D.D.: With Warhol it was always trusted, known and sometimes also loved products. Unlike Duchamp, he didn't seek out aesthetically neutral or uninteresting objects. Warhol had been a graphic artist for advertising, he only selected beautiful objects. He knew about the beauty of the world of objects. It really was a question of aesthetic pleasure. He also earned a VIP status through his later glamour. The Factory had pop groups and film makers in attendance, there was an aura of complete and overflowing life. That never happened with Fluxus. They were always anarchic, and always posed as objectors. Perhaps from time to time they would have liked to have success, but they never got it. The only one who made any money with this Fluxus principle was Michael Berger in Wiesbaden with the Harlekin Mail Order Company. He produced the gag-objects that you can buy in souvenir shops or at the airport. For example, coffee mugs with tits on them. With that, he made a lot of money. His model was Fluxus, and even today he sponsors Fluxus artists!

A.K.: There are parallels all over the place to products that are offered here by TOPSHOP. [They lie] somewhere between souvenir and art object, and call us to reflect. I would like to move via Warhol to a discussion of marketing. Among other things, what is interesting about the Warhol Brillo Boxes is that someone who called himself Arthur C. Danto and who worked as a critic in New York, as he saw the Brillo Boxes, he thought he saw the end of art right there before his very eyes. He said: now the brandname products from the supermarket have become indistinguishable from art works. The Brillo Boxes look just the same as these soap products. It is a wash powder. When one looks more closely, one notes that here is a screen printed wooden box, an art object standing furthermore in a gallery. We find ourselves then in the simulacra of contemporary product configurations. Products as illusions. We act as if that is really life, we act, as if YOU are that, its YOUR identity, as if there was something to gain for you and truly JUST for you. That's what I was getting at: that individuality has something to do with mass products, that are today or tomorrow already different to the way they were yesterday. We want to know how this mechanism functions, this original that I must have in order to be an individual that I otherwise would not be.

B.R.: That's not quite right. The original models of products (you must remember that I'm speaking here on behalf of products) don't have very much to do with art. We've asked how deeply consumers look into what lies behind products. No one looks that deep, or at least it's an individual question. The entire market today is swinging. Naturally, prestige brands don't really have to worry. Persil is Persil and will remain Persil. There you can do what you will. But of course everyone there is an ongoing attempt to sell these name products for a high premium, and that isn't working. It's not as straightforward as it was ten or twenty years ago. Then, brands were clearly defined. No one asked if they really represented higher quality or not. Brand names equalled security. But today all that is dissolving, differentiating. People seek the individual, the feeling of happiness. Today what marketing wants to find out is: how do we get our hands on these unpredictable consumers? How do I manage to understand what will happen tomorrow? How can I manufacture a product that satisfies these ever more differentiated wishes and needs.

Now it's being suggested: get artists into marketing. They will tell you how far you can push your brands, to what degree you can expand the envelope and thereby provoke a reaction. For example, H&M [Hennes & Mauritz] is hiring designers from London fashion schools to purchase vintage clothing. That's currently "in". Consumers stand there and think: "At H&M there's now second hand clothes. I don't get it. Berlin is second hand already." It's faked vintage, they're vintage collections that look like jackets and coats from the sixties and seventies.

D.D.: Complete with wear and tear?

B.R.: Sometimes, but that's been around for years, and there we end up with the question of the original yet again. There is here in Berlin a Diesel Store that sells jeans for hundreds of Euros, because they are allegedly one-offs, or because they are old, or somehow unique. I don't know who sits there and makes the holes and the stains, but it's done. Next door is a Levi's store that also sells "original jeans". There you go in, and there are no shelves, there the jeans are hanging from nails embedded in the wall. They have no recognisable form. You can't search for jeans via size, nor via shape or model. They don't have that. Rather, you are supervised and think: I want to have the Levi's from this period or that and perhaps there is one available here and that costs a lot of money.

D.D.: ...and these are in every instance used Levis?

B. R.: Not necessarily...

D.D.: They were produced a long time ago, and have been stored like fine wine?

B. R.: Like sneakers that are re-released. Old sneakers from the 1980s, or perhaps some from that period that were never sold. They are difficult to find, and people pay a lot of money for them, because they are originals.

D.D.: So it's a sort of temporally compressed antique trade.

A.K.: There is also the fashion phenomena of apparently dirty clothes. They are coloured so that one looks like someone who runs around in dirty clothes.

Audience: That means "the luxury of dirt"!

D.D.: On the other hand there are a lot of people who do that themselves.

B. R.: Exactly, and the trend scouts see people running around in jeans that they have flecked with colours, and made holes in, or in jeans that they have resuscitated after ten years and so on. And so they take the news to the industry and people try and market it.

A.K.: Lets attempt to come to a more experimental terrain. There was previously the idea: there is an avant garde. There is a genius subject who is capable of inventing new things that have an innovative effect. Corresponding with this thought was an environment that had to cope with and deal with innovation and was itself an effect of innovation: adaptation, reproduction and so on. Previously, artists used to presume that artistic production set aesthetic standards, which in turn would be adopted by advertising or industry.

Then one day a new theory is standing in the room: "in all honesty, the trendscoots, the advertisers and the designers are actually much more innovative than artists. The artists are completely retarded, because they are still hanging on to outdated modes of production, and sit around discussing things in categories that are totally archaic instead of reading the signs of the times and going out there and hitting the street. " There was this theory that the relationship had been inverted. That the innovativeness, which artists in the renaissance had so demonstrated, wasn't to be found in the arts any more, but in other realms of society. In design, in politics and in business above all. After all, that's where most of the money is. They pay a lot of money for what is made up in the think tanks. What remains for the arts is to reflect upon the totality.

We're not a part of the process of invention anymore. The Nike shoe, for example, that's already been invented, sure, but what I do with it, that's where the avant garde lies now. That's where my individuality is to be found. The result of this sort of logic is that the object doesn't matter, it's how you use it that counts, and that's the sort of logic that advertising has been aiming at for years. The starting point is always a brand, and that it is for example a shoe, but what matters is what you DO. For example, Nike's advertising in Berlin began to aggressively provoke suburban rivalries with the slogan: "Hold your ground against your neighbouring borough". The attempt to insinuate and then steer a social situation is the direction that brands and industries want to move in, they really want to embed themselves deep in the stream of life.

J.S.: Of course originality has got something to do with belonging to a group. How many people are actually original? When someone does something completely alone, I'm convinced that doesn't have anything to do with fashion. Art is somewhat different. For many purchasers and collectors it is very important to possess a work no one else can have.

B. R.: But only if it is famous. Or known about. To purchase art from an unknown artist, well, I could also buy chewing gum, it wouldn't make me proud.

J.S.: It is in any case always a question of belonging. Can I afford to look at a Picasso completely on my own, or do I make him accessible?

D.D.: There are also people who have works, world famous works, stolen just so that they can look at them alone.

J.S.: That is a myth.

D.D.: But it's a beautiful myth.

The text from Groys ["The New: An Experiment in Cultural Economy" is on writing unpublished in English although a long essay has been published in artnodes <http://www.uoc.edu/artnodes/eng/art/groys1002/groys1002.html>] has caused a lot of controversy in art circles. One artist, Andrea Knoblauch, challenged artists to formulate new works in response to this text. Groys is a metaphilosopher. He doesn't name any concrete examples of artists, that he wanted to burden with this praxis. And I also believe that artists have in part already progressed beyond this approach of

Groys. An example occurs to me: Plamen Dejanoff and Svetlana Heger, who have declared their use of a BMW a work of art. A Z3 Coupe—heavily customised: if I buy a BMW, I'm busy for two days until every option and detail has been chosen, and then it is built to my specifications. The extension of this is the Gläserne Fabrik [the "Glass Factory" in central Dresden, named after its sheet glass walls], where I can so to speak "oversee" the production of a Volkswagen Phaeton and can screw the wheel nuts on myself at the very end. That induces the feeling that it really is "my" car, built only for me.

Anyway, Plamen Dejanoff and Svetlana Heger bought and drove a BMW. They declared the car a work of art and produced a complete sequence of secondary artefacts. There are digitally edited photos of the car, there are rims of glass that have been made as replicas of the alloy-rims that BMW make. These artefacts can be purchased and exhibited in living rooms by art collectors, or BMW enthusiasts for that matter. To top it all off, the artists then sold the Z3 as an artwork to the Museum für angewandte Kunst (Museum of Applied Art) in Vienna, but then got to keep driving it. The museum pays for everything: the car, the insurance, the car insurance and the art insurance. We've ended up in a perverse complex of self devouring marketing strategies.

Audience: Was there a particular motivation for the Museum's purchase?

D.D.: The Museum collects art and it collects design. In this case, they got two in one.

A.K.: That is yet another good example of how branding is reflected, imitated and then actually practised in the arts. In the early nineties the pair of artists prepared a platform. That was all: "we won't produce anything, we won't place anything here, we won't choose what will be placed here. Rather, we will section of three square metres and allow firms, or anyone who wants to, to rent this space and place their advertisement here. We recode this art space into a public space, where there has always been advertising. And we say it explicitly: Here in the museum it is anyway all about managing image and promoting brand!" One after another the firms got interested, amongst them BMW, and an economic model uncoiled from the work. The money that they made on the rent was invested in designer objects. These they bought and exhibited at the same spot in the museum, and so on and so on. But what did they achieve, in the end? The artist as sampler, that is the argument that we would now like to turn to. It is no longer about producing objects, but rather about how we comport ourselves in relation to the production of objections and the micro-economy. How do we find a way to engage with this field that artists have always regarded as something abstract and foreign, that is this universe of the economy? To articulate ourselves in this universe, that's something we've thought about a lot over the last ten years, and TOPSHOP is a result of some of this consideration. How can I claim a place in the economy as it is today, as it handles images. How can I participate in production and, when possible, maintain some sort of critical distance?

D.D.: To remain briefly with the example of BMW and Plamen Dejanoff/Svetlana Heger: here there was a sort of strange double break. The artists always maintained that they were sponsored by BMW. However I spoke with the BMW cultural attaché, and she said that the artists bought the car totally normally. That means that when one accuses the pair of being instruments of industry because they allowed themselves to be promoted by BMW in an art context, well it is simply not true. Quite the opposite: they consciously constructed their claims in order to provoke the reproach! They always maintained that they were corporate artists, but clearly they have also set themselves up as "fake corporate artists".

A.K.: Can market research also learn from such concepts?

A.K.: Market research is interested in the entire public sphere, so naturally all these trends play a role. One attempts to adapt them for the masses, and that's naturally where it gets difficult, because everything changes so quickly.

A.K.: Are there questions in the audience?

Audience: I would like to know in what manner all these topics discussed influences the education of artists. How do I learn to make a place for myself, participate in production and maintain critical distance? How do you see your possibilities of production?

A.K.: This "you" refers above all to Dieter Daniels and myself, seeing as we both teach at the Art Academy.

J.S.: The Art Academy of Leipzig is a good example. As far as I can remember, it is possible to buy artworks directly at the annual exhibition. The annual exhibition really is a very good forum for public presentation.

Audience: I am specifically interested in whether you would view it as your task, in your role as teachers of artists, to make them adapt to the art market? Or do you take a very different position? For example, amongst the many things that were discussed today, there was the concept of the avant garde, a phenomena that doesn't have to live for ever, no more than the concept of originality, for that matter...

A.K.: The Art Academy and how it reconciles its students to the economics that rule the art world leads us relatively far from our discussion topic this evening, but of course the question of how we can interact with the economy is completely valid. It's the question of what chance one has of engaging, when everything can be economised. That's the wider context. When one says "You can buy a lifestyle"—a prominent slogan for TOPSHOP—one means that everything has been gradually subordinated to economic categories and finally become thinkable, haveable and liveable in monetary terms. What we are doing, when we say that one can use (for example) the Nike shoes in this or that way, is engaging in an economically connoted production of difference. Modern logic still spoke of an origin when it spoke of an original, of a unique exemplar. The postmodern only speaks of differences. The very first, the original, doesn't exist. The artist was never the genius that brought something into the world in a godlike manner. Rather the artist was always a member of a tradition, part of a social, cultural and institutional environment. What we do is produce differences, and that is identity. That would be a post modern definition of identity.

B. R.: That is exactly where artists and consumers meet. At some point they simply blurred together. Where is the artist and where is the consumer? The consumer who actually chases all of these paradigms of individuality, the whole classical theory of the sense of belonging and so on: one attempts to portray oneself, to pose, to feel like one belongs and also to border one's self off. Sure, the broad masses are not so intellectual or reflective, but the striving after individuality remains a great struggle. It has been like this for years and it will stay this way. Everyone has to communicate, everyone has to feel like they belong, and here the differences between artists and consumers are really not so big. The artist is also someone who is continually playing with advertising, with production, with what he sees. And because everything is possessable, purchaseable, everything has become a product. A Sanyo photocopier, like the one standing here, can also suddenly become fancy. That is a product, and it will be engaged with, its limits explored, it will eventually become art and perhaps also a very exclusive product.

D.D.: I would also like to say something about this apparent similarity between artists and consumers. And also with about what we do to provide impetus at the Art Academy. I think it is a strange situation there. There are interviews for applicants to art schools, and it's only twenty out of every four hundred who are offered a place to study there. What the applicants often say regarding their expectations and why they would like to study art is often heart rendingly naive. This cliché, of being a genius and a part of the avant garde, is still really deeply rooted! That means that they are perhaps a lot smarter as consumers than they are as artists when they begin art school. And our task is to make them as artists at least as smart as they already are as consumers.

Audience: Are the people who are creative (or innovative) the ones who sell themselves the best?

J.S.: It is about what will generate interest, and what won't. Creativity is often acquired by training, and can be a fiction. For example in business enterprises it is often heard: We are one team, we are a happy family. That's learned and in retrospect believed.

Audience: For me that seems to be a paradox. I'm creative and individual, and as a result not compatible with the masses. On the other hand I am creative and individual when I sell myself as successfully as possible.

D.D.: In terms of products, that is perfectly correct. How can I sell individuality to someone? How can I sell something to them that promises, that they will be individual through having it? That's a contradiction in terms, but it cuts to the heart of the arts world. The entire publishing industry, for example, is transforming itself at the moment. With "printing on demand" I can find a publisher for my book. And thereby I can prove that I'm an author, a genius. In the traditional publishing industry I wouldn't have managed that. But there are only so many copies that either I or my friends will purchase (unless I write a best-seller). That's how the market works for customised cultural products in creative niches.

A.K.: What is happening politically is that creativity is becoming obligatory. Earlier, one could perhaps say that it was a distinction, if you were creative. Nowadays the injunction runs: you must be creative, you don't have a chance otherwise. Today you are responsible for designing your life yourself. That which was previously a privilege, and bound up with art, has become an obligation on us all. As a result this image of artists—for example, chicks on speed, has become socially and economically attractive.

D.D.: But this is also the spread of the principle of self exploitation, that has been growing in the arts. 90% were always doing very badly, 5% were doing OK and a few did very well indeed. It is the principle of self exploitation and of "just hanging in there".

Audience: In the question about quality earlier you could here the subtext: how does one determine quality? It seems that quality is determined by the volume of sales and the price. At also appears that the more expensive brands are the better their quality. Therefore value is determined in abstract economic space. It isn't about the product as such anymore. For me the question then arises: does a product have more worth than can be economically measured? And if not, where will we end up?

A.K.: The issue of quality with regard to art works in on the one hand an opportunity for negotiation...

Audience: I'm under the impression that most people—as in the case of “star search” on TV, where people apply in droves—think in economic terms. In the sense of: “I don't have anything else, I only have my creativity, perhaps I can translate that into financial success”. Therefore not naive at all, but rather direct to the heart of the matter. What they don't have is the naivety to wish for: involvement in society, or cultural participation with faith and engagement.

A.K.: But isn't that exactly the contradiction: “Look, you have the voice, that's all you need to be successful and you can have it, you can have success, and have it tomorrow as the new singer on RTL! That's something that we couldn't have imagined thirty years ago, which is incidentally where you would end up with the argument about quality.

D.D.: But this casting business really is something that has a curious sort of relatedness to the art world. In so far as you can go from nil to a hundred simply through your creativity articulates alone. I just treated this idea as naive, because it depends upon the notion of genius. But you are right, that was rather archaic of me, and the idea is actually hyper-contemporary! It's not naive, it's apparently realistic. An example is the boom in Leipzig painters, that has produced a sequence of youths who can earn 25,000 Euros for a single painting, and paint two of them a month fulfilling orders places in advance. That's not bad at all, especially considering they've only been out of art school for three or four years.

J.S.: The difficulty here again arises, that you have those upon the market who respond to demand, but want to be independent all the same. The paintings will get older, and perhaps not sell as well. Then the question is, what will they do then? How strong is the influence of the art market on the sort of art produced?

D.D.: And to what extent they constitute a model for those students who come after them, and then find they don't achieve the same success?

Audience: It sounds to me like it doesn't matter anymore what the art work is, or what it's potential meaning is for the individual or the creator. Rather, it's as if I construct an economic framework in which I intervene as an artist. What I actually produce is unimportant, I just maintain the framework in which I engage. Perhaps that's something to think about...

Audience: “Economy” - what is it really? Is it just the monetary economy, or something else as well? For me the term “economy” is much broader. The social has a role to play, as does culture. One can't separate them. I have the feeling that we are talking far too much about: what does this and that cost? What has also shocked me is how focused on the market that is. Of course it is important that people sell their works, but it is also important to think about alternatives. There are many artists that are taking a different path to the one shown here.

A.K.: I hope that we haven't caused any misunderstanding. Of course we are together in search of these alternatives! We aren't amongst those who find it desirable that students at art school spend most of their time studying how to bring their art works to market as quickly as possible. Quite the contrary. Rather, we are interested in how one as an artist finds possibilities of engagement for an emancipatory practice in an economy as it functions today. An articulation of practice that is not still further inferior to the classical differentiation and standards of artistic production and valuation. We said before: three quarters of us on the panel are from the arts, and we can initially only speak and develop ideas from an artists perspective. What we cannot manage is an authoritative discussion of new economic production models or the entire field of the creative industries...

Audience: This is more about the terminology. How someone uses the word economy. It's very one-sided, not here, but in general this term has really transformed. It originates from the Greek eukos, and that means “the entire house”. It is much more complex.

A.K.: I would like to return to the question of the original and quality. The question for us is—and with us I mean this field of the arts, and that includes not only artists, but the entire field of cultural production: the designers, the architects, the curators and the various, no longer clearly definable branches in which they work—which practices need to be established. Critical practices, but naturally practices of survival that can then further articulate themselves.

D.D.: I think there are many different ways of achieving happiness these days. Today there are very many independent and parallel systems in which I can involve myself, in the democratic process of the autonomous structure, for example the NGBK [the New Society for Visual Art www.ngbk.de]. But I can also, by the end of my twenties, already be a big deal in the museums and have skipped over the entire process, if I've been discovered and pushed at the right moment. That is a new phenomena. That means: the possibility of complete acceleration of the appreciation of value. That never happened before the 1960s and in the 1980s only occurred in isolated cases: that young artists rode the wave of the boom all the way into the museums in the matter of a few years. Many other hopeful talents see that and think: I want it too!... but it doesn't work like that. The alternative is the “long march through the institutions”. The process, by which I mean what one does oneself and how the society partakes in it,

also allows works to be created, and perhaps more democratic or discursive works.

A.K.: Above all, there is beyond affirmation and refusal still other practices than those that Dieter Daniels has already described. I think a project like TOPSHOP is to be located in the context of the search for practices other than the alternatives just offered. In the beginning of the 90s there was a project in Cologne known as Copyshop. That functioned differently to here, but was comparable. It was conceived—and this was important for the arts in the 90s in Germany—as a place of production for discourse and discussion. It was about a political project initiated in the arts, centred around enabling engagement and self empowerment. And for it stands here a perfect device: a photocopier. That is a device for self empowerment. That's its history. Around this machine materialises the place of the consumers in the context of this project. A place where producers can become consumers and consumers can become producers, and their can perhaps be a relationship of exchange, where authority [& authorship] is continually swapped. Where there will be economies which we have to work out from scratch, economies that we perhaps don't even know of yet, in which identity and collectivity emerge from and are generated by a communal practice. That is the model—a model that also stands behind this photocopier and behind TOPSHOP—that has always represented a cultural and political utopia.

And that is perhaps sufficient to bring this panel to an end.

(Translation by Adam Jasper Smith)