



Transcription of the discussion between

Antek Walczak (Bernadette Corporation) and Fulvia Carnevale

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Antek Walczak (Bernadette Corporation): Ok, welcome here. We're going to begin with ten minutes from a film that we did, we meaning Bernadette Corporation, called "Get Rid of Yourself". So we're going to roll those ten minutes and then I'll speak a couple of minutes about that and then we can go into the rest of the program.

Film- "Get Rid of Yourself" (excerpt of the voiceover)

Twenty years. Twenty years of counter revolution, of prevention. In Italy and elsewhere. Twenty years of sleep under the eyes of security guards, behind security gates. [...] Twenty years. The past does not pass because war continues, circulates, extends. New calibration of subjectivities in a new surface peace. An armed peace that hides the unfolding of an imperceptible civil war. Twenty years. There was punk, the movement of '77, the city Indians, an eruption, a whole counter world of subjectivities who no longer wanted to consume. Who no longer wanted to produce, who no longer even wanted to be subjectivities. The revolution was molecular. The counter revolution was also molecular. [...]

WALCZAK BC: Now to just briefly explain to you the context or how the film was made- Bernadette Corporation, which is loosely a group of people or collaborative if you will. We started in NY in the early 90s and now presently we are kind of scattered. Myself living between Paris and Berlin. Another in Berlin, one in New York. So, that's a little quick description of this group. We had encountered people or made some friends back in 2001 where the idea came up to go to Genoa for the G8 summit and of course its counter summit. Most of you might know what happened there. A couple of days of rioting, Carlo Giuliani being murdered by the police... What is interesting for me with the film is that it was the first step of deciding to go to Genoa is kind of responding to a situation, a kind of atmosphere at the time. Because already in that year there was a build up in counter summit movement of the Black Block. There was this idea of some kind of counter movement within the anti globalization movement. So we were attracted by that and curious about that, this already existing phenomenon. We also had the opportunity to get close with people who were making up Black Block... After Genoa once we started editing the film, then Sept 11th happened and that got worked into the film. One of us

was in New York and just filmed the falling of the twin towers. After that event we began to experience official security crackdown, more power for the police, where the possibilities of open legal activity was drastically reduced. In a sense the film was made under that atmosphere and responding to this. It wasn't really setting a political program but sort of influenced by the external events and there's a relationship there that's kind of important which we'll get back to in a second. Furthermore we were curious about the idea of a film-tract, making an anti-film track in the days when film-tracts are a thing of the past. Nowadays we are more into documentary or activist documentary. The film-tract in the 60s was something that was really dedicated to a highly politicized audience. People who were organizing either in the unions or aside from their unions in '68 etc. It was a kind of decided a way of using cinema to further educate, tool to existing political situation. Film tracts did not come out of a void of no political situation, they accompanied one. We were curious in taking that form in today where situations aren't clear. Seeing what can be done in sense of opening up our own emptiness in a sense, our own isolation and having space of reflection. Thirdly, the film shows what situation is today.

CARNEVALE: I would like to ask you a couple of question about the process of production. This problem of political art that has been touched yesterday is always the problem of the topics, of subject of the artwork. I guess political art, if there is a political art, is possible to define as political through the process of production. So I'd like to ask you something about the choice of working in a collective form, the collective structure and choosing not to use your own name, and how it relates with the problems of the authorship and the crisis of the authorship which I think you are aware of, in your novel as well?

WALCZAK BC: First of all one part of the process was we didn't have a script and we barely even had a treatment. We had just loose idea of arriving somewhere. It was really about encounter, we saw what happens in a collective. Rather than one being sure and creating picture of the world to conform to that vision. In Bernadette Corporation we start to find a way to explore ourselves and things we want to film at the same time which can be as simple as even beginning to agree on certain terms and establishing common language. Once you create space in collective, ideals open up on the world. We try to push Bernadette Corporation as not collective of 3 people. We just wrote collective novel, with number of writers involved. I think that's one thing. Elaborating space among many and other things interesting in not having script is you open yourself up to things, to moments when there is doubt, when you are not sure what you're going to be doing. That is an important reflection needed in this kind of work. if art is going to deal with politics maybe it has space to think things differently. A kind of space of experimentation.

CARNEVALE: Do you think that space of experimentation is a space that has a proper strength, can it be assumed as a weapon or is it a protected space to start with? This is the problem of the process that I was asking about.

WALCZAK BC: I think that space, I don't see how it can become a weapon because it is so difficult to establish. It becomes something that is against every notion of the demands of work in present day

society, where work is accountable. It has to do something, fit somewhere and usually be generated towards profit. And if you say we are going to create a space where we decide to work together where maybe we won't even do anything, that's going against the capitalist work ethic. Even in a sense of how it is communicated. If you say to someone I'm going to work on something, they ask what is it, you lay out your idea, communicate, it becomes shrunken on topic and if you just talk to people and say we are purely going to open up a process, anything can happen and that's really dangerous and the weapon I guess. You might start with idea of doing one project and end up with something totally unexpected.

CARNEVALE: Yes for instance, this use of the several voices that don't necessarily identify to anybody inside this movie. That don't really identify to real social actors. That don't kind of recover the reality of the events. In this position between fiction and documentary that has been taken in "Get Rid of Yourself" in particular, do you think it is something you had been planning, to create that space or it just came out?

WALCZAK BC: It was a desire we always had because above all else we didn't want to get into the realm of documentary. That's the difficulty, to escape the realm of documentary. I think Godard was saying that in a fiction film is the image that has a kind of primacy, is the main thing and sound is only there to support image, because what you see happening in a fiction film, like a man going to a bank and robbing it or a couple embracing, that is primary and the voice is supporting that the documentary is the reverse where you have the authority of voice that tells you what you are looking at, speaks from a point of truth, a lot of times documentaries assume that point of truth, the images are put together to support whatever ideas are being supported by the voice. We were moving away from documentary form. I don't want to get too much into the specifics of the film since we didn't show the entire thing and a lot of people don't know what it is, I think.

CARNEVALE: Another problem, one of the main problems of contemporary art, is this relationship to I wouldn't say "real life" but to this lack of experience, this crisis of experience. I think about the definition that Benjamin gives of what is speaking about between the first and second world war, but I guess the process went down and got worse and worse and worse and I guess that influences the product of contemporary art. How do you deal in your collective activities, in your production with this lack of experience and problem of representing the struggle or things that you don't necessarily live or you don't necessarily know? It's just because this position of ambiguity in your production, which is very interesting to me. I think it points to an important problem.

WALCZAK BC: This question of lack of experience is something that could open up, it's not necessarily the curse of the artist per se, it occurs in many other levels. Could it occur on a level of militancy and activism?

CARNEVALE: Of course, I think it is a kind of disease that affects society and maybe one of the scariest diseases of the 21st century because of our growing poverty, of our relationships and our

concrete ability to get organised and fight the political conditions of oppression. We are not sociologists so we are not going to make a diagnosis of the actual situation. It seems very clear that this is the main question and that this question influences political art.

WALCZAK BC: This lack of experience for the artist, in art and politics can seem to be not so obvious. Because we have such an access to not only information...but because our subjective lives are determined by that. The personal as political...that went in horrible way, now the political has been personalized. You announce yourself as an anarchist or a neo-communist when in reality your relationship to society has nothing to do with it... You realize if you are going to experience something politically it will happen in large numbers of people, not in a small individual way because that is the way things have been organized, the way modern democracies are deployed it's about hurting the masses into doing one thing or another.

CARNEVALE: I guess this is the problem of political impotency that I think is treated not only in film but a major problem that also interrogates this question, this marriage, this strange meeting between art and politics. I don't know if art is interested in politics but politics is very interested in art and certainly art responds to society more than society responds to art. I think this is one of the main problems about how this practice can be considered as something that can take place in a resistance or in an attack on the elaboration or some other forms of struggle because It is always a very abstract level of discussion this meeting between art and politics, everything is very symbolic. But art, the demonstration, the counter-summit as a symbolic as projection of the movie. In their consequences on general politics. I'm not speaking about the consequences on subjective bodies and lives of people...

WALCZAK BC: So you are saying that in general politics a counter demonstration would have same resonance or lack of resonance as a piece of art? I kind of operate from this assumption that art cannot change people. You cannot have a conference or a film or an exhibition and invite an audience in that is not politicized to the subject or not organized and expect by this kind of conference or artistic intervention expect them to leave being converted and ready to organize. I think that's a bit of a fallacy. A lot of time the problem in that is if we tend to believe that our responsibility of artists is to form public then you get into dangerous, narrow terms. You start to get politically correct in the worst sense of the word I think.

CARNEVALE: I don't know. I will try to pose the question in another way. Let's go back to the problem of the crisis of the position of the artist. I was talking about the lack of experience, political impotency... How do you deal with this position? Do you think that through your practice and questioning you are trying to escape that? Or, I don't know if it is true, art is just a section of the market after all?

WALCZAK BC: I don't know, we are blundering our way through it and unfortunately life ends at a certain point and you might not even get to these questions. Even in the space of art there are pressures to make a coherent work. The notion of the body of the work.... It was a fabrication by art

gallerists. How do you deal with one artist who began one way and ends up as an anarchists and as a dealer you have to string that together. We're talking about the pressures that are not only from market but archive...That enters into system of classification too. Usually the state picks up the balance of obligation. In the face of this kind of determination of your artwork and how it is perceived through the mechanisms of solo shows, group show or catalogues etc., it really is the struggle to decide not to become choice A or B, when the other choice is nothing, nothing meaning death or starvation or poverty. Poverty which is less and less becoming a livable space.... We want to try to create a structure, a self organized structure through which we can determine our own actions and determine our own processes without conforming to the notion of a project.

CARNEVALE: So you think that basically this kind of protected space of production, of laboratory...that you can create under the pretext, under the shared idea of making something together that is supposed to be art can produce something else? Can produce other life forms that are resistant to the actual political situation? This is the main question, I don't have any personal answer to it but I hope there can be one, I guess people are questioning this space.

WALCZAK BC: You can do it. You can by physically opening up a space and interacting with public and trying to think of ways to interact the public, other than existing audience, unexpected things can happen, you open yourself up to those possibilities. I really think that, I don't know if it is about leading to create resistances but I think maybe the artist could become more open to perhaps currents of resistance which are already existing. And that's what I would hope.

CARNEVALE: Yes but the unexpected thing that can happen is being bought by the Flick collection or whatever... Dan Graham is in the Flick collection, and his aesthetics and the contents of his work did not save him from this destiny. It is kind of a general problem of what we produce and how we produce the things we make...

WALCZAK BC: The question of the product of what we make is aesthetics which is the sort of detachable thing right?

CARNEVALE: Yes, it is extremely detachable because you can see decorations going from the squats to the trendy bars. There's no aesthetics of clothing of people, of pretended rebellions becoming fashionable. So you don't have any kind of security in choosing an aesthetic. I think the main thing is insisting on process on the communal activity that can maybe transform the subjectivities. Because to me the crises is not any more the problem of the relationship to the object, the material that you are putting together for making your artwork or mixing together because it's already made and your are mixing it. But it is really about the subject that is doing it. Because the subjectivity itself has become ready made. We are produced industrially by the same movies, by the same cultural product....so how can we deal with this problem? That I think is a major problem. Do you think you can find strategies of de-subjectivisation inside the creative process? I think it's not hopeless....

WALCZAK BC: It's not hopeless, there's always the danger in the collective that it gets taken over by an idea of we have to do this one thing and then it kind of becomes a really oppressive device, that basically destroys any individuality or destroys the individual. There's something about not imposing the individual on the collective because those two are constantly negotiated by the other. That is the difficult thing and challenge to working in group. How can you find yourself a few steps from where you were before, or even adapt to a conflict in a situation, not back down, not create a giant wall. This is all stuff that is negotiated on a very intimate level. And you do show that, I think we do end up reflecting that in a way. For example, this book called *Reena Spaulings* by Bernadette Corporation. This novel itself created a strange type of collective machine, which I wouldn't say is the ideal, fulfilling one but because there were three people, we've separated in different cities...then we had to work with dozens of other people at the same time. There became a committee of six to seven who would do the work...and then send out assignments to all of the writers, which you could do or not do. The understanding was that whatever you wrote could be manipulated, rewritten, maybe not used etc. So you were surrendering as a writer like when I was putting myself on the page and then surrendering it and sending it off at the same time. The interesting thing about this kind of collective work, was that I always had that structure if I wanted to...which is interesting and different than trying to undertake a creative process from the start.... Although this is more machine like...not a human collectivity...it still became for a time if there were a map of these things, you would've seen it kind of pulsating and throbbing a certain kind of group of people in a few cities. Could those kind of models be applied otherwise? We are not really thinking so much of exporting them, we are really just into experimenting with them and seeing what we can try to do in those conditions.

CARNEVALE: May I ask a nasty question for finishing? What do you think of the point of departure of Bernadette Corporation and your kind of trajectory? Because you started from fashion and kind of underground space in New York. Do you think that if you met now and had started now you would have made the same thing you made when you started at that time? Do you think the evolution is a reaction to the historical change, to the meetings of people or it's something that is kind of included in your subjectivity, in your communal evolution?

WALCZAK BC: I think it's very connected to the historical things. When we started at the time we started, in the early nineties in New York there was a whole different idea. That's when the so called categories started to collapse. Art and fashion started being thrown together, all these things of crossing different mediums and disciplines. It was very much in the air. It was probably at the moment when Bernadette Corporation was in perfect collision with the trends of the time. There was this movement about we can make our own spaces together and a naiveté about the system of business. You have to remember that 1992, was the year that punk broke. Kurt Cobain and company saw their obscure music being sold by major labels so there was this impression that the market could take any product.... I think we've been really determined by things that we've experienced.... What would happen if we met today? I don't know, we have these talks about why are we still together. I always come up with the wrong answer. I say Bernadette Corporation stays together because none of us

would make it individually, we would do nothing, we would be hopeless. And that's really not fair to say, that doesn't emphasize the joy of experiencing other people working on the same thing. But that does say something about the need we have. It's not only from a market stand point but if I am isolated in my own room and all I have access to is a great dvd library, a host of wonderful philosophy and theory books and I lead an alienated experience on the streets in bars, restaurants or grocery stores that's not going to be a very creative position for me. It's going to be a very sterile position for me.

CARNEVALE: I just wonder because for instance "Get Rid of Yourself" couldn't have been made certainly after September 11th and I know we shared this agreement about the importance of the analysis of Foucault, about the bio-powers, this idea that the bodies are separated and entirely governed and basically taken in hostage by our democracies. But I wonder if this kind of way to accompany this history of the tortured contemporary bodies that go from fashion to this question about counter summit and riots and how the bodies are in the riots and how Reena Spaulings and these other characters explore the town as a mental experience and not a real one. There is not a line that can kind of lead your production, this kind of attention to the history of bodies in the twentieth century, like the major object of control of the power.

WALCZAK BC: You're saying that it's a line going through the work?

CARNEVALE: It's a question, I don't know, maybe it's not true.

WALCZAK BC: Maybe it's an observation that could be valid. I think these trajectories are going from here, from starting from where we began in this kind of sinister New York youth arena of art, in that sphere moving across these different thing and accompanying this notion of the body. You start to recognize your own limitations too at the end of the day. It's a question of the possibilities of class mobility, so to speak. Maybe I'm already there. Maybe I'm a terrified, starchy, trendy mother fucker just dying to finally get a washing machine, then I'll just close the doors and die quietly. And that's a very high probability because that's the destiny that is given to me; given where I was born and the way I was educated etc. It makes me wonder if there is a possibility of going out and exploding in another direction.

CARNEVALE: Maybe the public has got a few questions?

Question: Earlier you said that art can't change people or the artist can't expect that the art they produce will give people a sense of revolution, right? How is it that the artist approach his artwork thinking that people outside of the framework or space of that art will be able to take something from the work, as in a sense of revolution or feeling that they can change something? I think the danger of institutionalizing art is that it only circulates within those circles and those people on the outside don't

get any exposure to it. So how do you suggest that the artist can approach art feeling that it can indeed change people or give them some sense of revolution?

WALCZAK BC: I think that what is important, what I meant by saying that art can't transform people is that, I think if I was an artist and I was sitting in this elite rarified institutional, commercial space, my contact with the people is very limited. The most interesting thing is when you go out and you make contact, the artist mix up his subjectivity with their subjectivity...that is how art gets influenced by politics, from things happening outside. Let us take the example of Godard back in the 60s, as there was like a political group: Godard was heavily Maoist and he ran into Maoists when he was making the film "La Chinoise", and with Jean-Pierre Goran from this French Maoist party formed the Dziga Vertov Group. That is some contact made outside the sphere of the art. I think it has to be the question the artist has to ask himself-- am I going to be just dealing with information in an abstract way, manipulating it, either mirroring the game of mass media which you can never compete with in a sense, because you don't have half the deployment that they do like tv, mass media, radio or press, or can I go out and try to encounter things or people already existing? And then the work becomes more conformed and then it becomes a bit more of an exchange. It's like if you go on site and you start to collaborate or have something that they have an access to, really your own work is determined because you'll be in a neighborhood where people aren't necessarily going to swallow what you have to say. Whereas in an institution or normal art context there's room for a lot.

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