

Stefano Cagol and Angelique Campens in conversation

Book Launch at ArtBrussels

April 23, 2007, 4 pm

Brussels Expo, VIP Lounge

<http://www.artbrussels.be/debates.htm>

Angelique Campens:

Welcome to the conversation and book presentation of *Harajuku Influences*! First of all I want to introduce you to Stefano Cagol next to me, who is an Italian artist.

Stefano Cagol:

We are here! I want to show you a selection of works that is all about last year. We'll start with *Bird Flu Vogelgrippe* project...

AC:

...that you ended at the Berlin Biennale: it was an off-site project there, and makes me know your work!

SC: Yes! It's true!

AC:

The publication is in fact a summary of Stefano Cagol's last year projects where he made a research on contemporary influences, physical and mental ones, positive and negative ones: all his last projects are dealing with the topic of influences.

The same points of influence are nowadays everywhere, we are continuously influenced, easily influenced as a mass, not only as single beings by passion, politics, religion, sex, art, reality TV shows...

Stefano Cagol asked to critics and curators (they are David Elliott, Stefan Bidner, Andrea Lissoni and Roberto Pinto) to write texts about influences for his publication *Harajuku Influences*. I wrote the text "Manipulated Environment" for this book. The text is about ecology and manipulation, like for example in the genetics: for me is this one of the biggest influences nowadays we are dealing with! But I don't want to go further on this theme, because you can read the text on the publication or read it on-line on the web site of Stefano Cagol...

Now we will show you some videos of Stefano's last works. In the while, since the book is concerning with the topic of influences, I will make him some questions about influences.

SC: What are you watching on the screen is the starting of the *Bird Flu Vogelgrippe* project. It was supported by the Civic Gallery of Contemporary Art of Trento... and there's a good new because on next year this city, my city will be the host place of Manifesta!! But the project was supported also by other two public spaces: Museion, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Bolzano (the other neighbouring city where Manifesta will hold), and Kunstraum of Innsbruck.

We started with a van and we made a trip in the core of Europe. There are nine hundred kilometers from Trento to Berlin and we stopped in different places: sometimes they were the art spots and sometimes they were very symbolic places, historic places. We stopped one time at the Zeppelin Tribune in Nürnberg!

All the time there was a strength connection between the place and the writings on the van, the labels with the words of the title of the project. And from inside the van a loud sound of birds was coming out: in fact when we made this project we were very in the middle here in Europe of the completely crazy scaring fear about the bird flu. Bird flu is a metaphor of all influences; big part influences is artificial lake was artificial and built by media the fear about bird flu; sometimes influences are concrete sometimes no, are of the body and of the mind. At the moment the bird flu is still the same problem like last year, but media decided to speak no again about it, they didn't create the fear and so the problem doesn't exist for people: it's a media manipulation, media and money manipulation, for coming back to the title of your text, Angelique.

AC:

How can influenza create a hype, for example the one of bird flu?

SC:

The fear about bird flu was so strong, but at the same time for me it's so ironic. Everyone went crazy because all people, the humanity look like birds, like chicken!

AC:

... battery chicken! As mass, not individuals!

SC: Yes, sure!

AC:

Why did you work about influences? Why did you start with this "flu" word?

SC:

I started to work with propaganda tools to reflect about media mechanisms and media influence on us. So I began using badges with the "flu" term and

others. In fact during the trip we stopped with the van and distributed for free to everybody small badges with combinations of words with “flu”: not only bird flu, but money flu, sex flu, war flu...

We could make this combination with everything!... fashion flu, beauty flu, pussy flu, ass flu...

AC: But what about Harajuku in the title of your book? Can you explain us the meaning of the combination of this name with the influence word?

SC:

I think that every day I take new one different influences!

Harajuku is a place: it's in Tokyo.

It is a very interesting place, central, full of these young guys dressing like manga. It's strange! It's a very manipulated environment!

I lived in Harajuku Street for one month in 2004 and I think I received a big influence on my work and on my mind from this place. Now it is a part, a piece of my work and of my mind, of the sum of influences that builds my work and my mind.

In the while what you are watching on the screen is the step outside Museion in Bolzano. We were parking outside for some hours and children passed by... and the van looks full of birds...

AC:

Maybe you can show the encounter with the truck along the highway...

SC:

During the trip a lot things happens, not organized.

This I'm showing you was a very interesting meeting! We were in the highway, pretty close to Leipzig, not too far from Berlin. And we met a van with a big plastic chicken on the top: it was a chicken van and we were the chicken flu van! So we tried to follow this “friend” for twenty minutes, and on the van there was the German slogan “Nim mich!” meaning literally “Bring me!”

AC:

Can you show and explain us other parts of the video?

SC:

Maybe Berlin?

AC: Yes! The part of the Berlin Biennale where I met your work!

SC:

We parked in front of the Kunst Werke...

And there is an anecdote about fear, because on the day after our arrive in Berlin we found on all the covers of the newspapers of the city the news of the first case of bird flu in Berlin: "Vogelgrippe in Berlin" were the titles, everywhere! There was only this case, only one and so – I'm not sure, but... – I think it was an effect of the project, because it happens exactly the day after the project...

(a little bit of champagne...)

In front of Kunst Werke there was a lot of people, it was a big event, and people itself looks like birds! While inside Kunst Werke and around we distribute the badges with the combinations about flu.

AC:

Was it only for the opening? Am I right?

SC:

Yes, it was only one day!

AC:

But the van stays there for three days...

SC: Yes, it's true: we staid parked for three days, but the action was only for the day of the opening. While the duration of the entire trip was of one week: starting from Italy, stopping in Bolzano, Innsbruck, Munich, Nürnberg, then Berlin and back.

AC:

How did the Berlin Biennale react on this project? Because it was an off-site project...

SC:

I think it was the most interesting off project along Auguststrasse! Massimiliano Gioni and Cattelan, the curators, have been informed and they said me it was ok!

AC:

But did they know in advance about it? Or they discovered it there without knowing about it before?

SC: No, we sent the project to the office of the Kunst Werke and they put it in the VIP program of the Biennale as the unique special project of the 23rd.

Now we could “go” to Ghent!

AC: Yes. I’ve invited Stefano afterwards for a show there in a... zoo logical garden. And there he showed a “bird flu fridge”.

SC:

The installation in Ghent was really the second part of the Berlin project: not with the van, but with the fridge. Now I show you just three minutes of the video...

AC:

In your book you asked to critics and curators some questions about influences. Now I would like to make the same questions to you. So... what are you influenced by?

SC:

Flu... flu! I think that an artist now has to fight every day with the art system: the biggest flu is represented by curators, galleries, museums. While in general – as typically – by politics, religion, money!

AC:

In the book the dialogue with curators is like an interview and they all speak about mass media. And you Stefano, are you influenced by mass media?

SC:

For sure! The opposite is impossible! You have to live on a island somewhere! With no television, no mobile phone, no computer, no internet...

AC:

I mostly want to make to you the question you asked to critics and curators in the book if artists are influenced by critics...

SC:

I prefer to make this question to people with power... and I think that artists have not a lot of power.

Probably the situation has to change a little bit more: in the art system artists have to become part of system. Because now everything is decided by curators, by a small number of people.

We could say something also about “Zoo Logical”, the exhibition in Ghent we are watching on the screen...

AC:

No, I think it's not necessary because we are in Belgium now...

SC:

Ok, so now I show you very shortly an other project I realized after the one in Ghent. Just two weeks later! I went directly to Singapore and I made an other work like *Bird Flu*. Its like a twin.

It was the only Italian presence at the first edition of the Singapore Biennale. It was an off project, too, but it was an official satellite event completely supported by Fumio Nanjo, the curator of the Biennale, then I had a lot of help by the Italian Cultural Institute there and I worked with the ICA of Singapore for realizing it.

The same days of the opening of the Biennale in Singapore there was the meeting of the IMF – International Monetary Found and I went around Singapore with a small van with labels with the words “Power Station”, while from the van came out national anthems of G8 and of all the Asiatic area. It was a very interesting mix: you have for example Vietnam and US; all the countries of the area are ex-colonies. And now they will become the most powerful economy for the future! And they have a really clear idea to become very powerful! So Eastern against Western...

In this occasion we made a new series of badges with the combinations with the power word: firstly money power... In fact power is an other type of flu, very strong.

AC:

Can you explain us more about Singapore?

SC:

Singapore was so interesting because it's a very inter-racial place, international, multi-ethnic. You have Little India, China Town, you can find a lot of different people, cultures, languages together. And we went really everywhere!. We made a stop in front of the business center – Singapore is an important economical heart of Asia – and then we went to China Town, to the fish market.

AC:

How were the reactions of people?

SC: Very different from *Bird Flu*! People didn't understand really what happened. It looked like a political meeting... with anthems, flyers, badges... But people were interested on it...

Now I show you some pieces about the different stops in Singapore. This is the Laos anthem. We were in front of Wall Street and you can see the business guys with their white shirts.

AC:

In the while I want to ask you an other question you made to curators and critics. Which are for you the most spread influences nowadays?

SC:

The biggest? Is politics. It decides for everything. For ecology, for money... and is connected with the international power. It "is" everything.

Talking about power, I show you the most influencing staff. It's the last version of a work that I started six years ago. I think it's very clear the content... the stars and stripes flag...

AC:

In your book I saw your children drawings... with a lot of flags! You started very soon your project on influences!!

SC:

I was five years old. I worked a lot of times with flags, but I started really early, drawing flags everywhere. I think very important for me to find why I'm so attracted today by flags.

In a drawing is the Cold War, instead this is like Berlin with the wall... the Americans, the war...

AC:

What is this drawing on the left?

SC:

I don't know, I don't remember!

AC:

I have my last question for you. What is art influenced by?

SC:

The Art? For me art is life! Art is a big influence! It's the only way to live; it's no easy, but is beautiful.

At the same time you have to live, to work very close to the art system. As I told you before here is the system of galleries, museums, critics. This is the same for every artist... even if when he starts, every young artist has a very romantic vision about art. But at the end art is business, also for the artist: you have to live, you have to sell. It's different.

At the beginning every artist has also a romantic idea of the only importance of aesthetic; instead is important to have a strong message, to try to say something! Like in my video of the stars & stripes flag...

AC:

Can you tell us about your next project about flu and identity?

SC:

The one in Tokyo?

AC:

No, the simulation you showed me of the project for the gallery in Chelsea...

SC:

No, I'm afraid: I showed it only to you, but it's "top secret" for the public... You have to come to NYC for the opening and you will see the project...

AC:

Ok, ok, Stefano! We will be there!

Do you want to show an other video?

SC:

I don't know, I think we can stop here.
...now you can take a look to the book!

AC:

Ok. Thank you!

SC:

Thank you to everybody for coming!