

YOU ARE COURTEOUSLY INVITED

PHILIP VINCENT FOKKER *IN CONVERSATION WITH* OHAD BEN SHIMON + VENIAMIN KAZACHENKO

Anybody invited to realize a project in 1646 is asked to engage in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

This conversation takes place via e-mail and stretches through the whole period during which the artists develop their initial idea into final results. 1646 invites the correspondent at the other end of this contact to figure his/her way through this actual process.

In trying to picture what result the artists' work is going to, such exchange can become a reflection on the amount of otherwise untraceable choices of the moment which make up to the artists' practice.

This issue is part of the exhibition by Ohad Ben Shimon + Veniamin Kazachenko *You are Courteously Invited*, March 30 2012 till April 14 2012 in 1646.

This artist
Ohad Ben Shimon + Veniamin Kazachenko

This correspondent
Philip Vincent Fokker

Concept and design
Nico Feragnoli

1646.

Boekhorststraat 125, 2512 cn, The Hague
The Netherlands

<http://1646.nl> - info@1646.nl

MARCH 21: Philip Vincent Fokker [PHVF] to Ohad Ben Shimon [OBS] and Veniamin Kazachenko [VK]

Why are the two of you sticking together for this project? I would like to hear from both of you, without having discussed the question together.

OBS:

Hi Philip,
Well first of all we were asked to by 1646. Its like a predetermined marriage. Besides that point we have gained experience and understanding of each other's point of view on certain matters. I see it like a relationship. Why do people stay together in general? I guess it also has to do with processes of mirroring, bouncing off, etc. in which we try to optimize and inspire each other. We spend a lot of time together anyway so its just a continuation of that space/time in a way.

VK:

... sounds like a relationship therapy question?
We almost broke up this morning!
But anyway I guess it's because I like Ohad's view on things, it's very different from mine and at the same time we seem to understand one another.
It's not so much this project in specific but more of a general idea which we share. It's about the life theatre or theatre of life. It's like we live in some kind of constant comical drama, it's very Jewish somehow. Ohad is like a modern day Sholem Aleichem [a leading Yiddish author and playwright] for me, I like the way he is dealing with circumstances in life and how he puts things in a comical perspective.
We have a great deal of laughing, while we should be crying and we are crying but the laughter is too loud to hear the misery, or better yet we are laughing at our miseries to fight off depression. It's a gulag syndrome for me. Life's hard. Having a good laugh makes things easier to carry.
For this project we want to test our post-dramatic theatre idea. It's an experiment.

MARCH 22: PHVF OBS/VK

Dear Gentlemen,
Exchanging ideas seems like an interesting and inspiring way to deepen your individual points of view. Especially with someone like-minded. But the theatre of life also has an audience. Do you have the feeling that you have to justify the project/work you are creating/ cooking up right now? If yes: why & to who in particular? If no: why not?

OBS/VK PHVF [typed from video]

OBS: [reading from computer]

“...Gentlemen,

Exchanging ideas seems like an interesting and inspiring way to deepen your individual points of view. Especially with someone like-minded. But the theatre of life also has an audience. Do you have the feeling that you have to justify the project/work you are creating/ cooking up right now? If yes: why & to who in particular? If no: why not?”

VK: ... God...

OBS: He's a smart-ass this guy ... what the fuck...

VK: ... uhhh... we're gonna flunk this test... [laughter]

OBS: What is this Question #2 thing..? What is this, like an American ... quiz..?

VK: I'm fucked, man ... I can't handle this question ... [laughter] ... I'm too stupid for this ... I can't ... I'm not gonna pass this test...

OBS: Question #2 ... it's like ... really scary ... How 'bout we answer with a question to him..? How 'bout we put him under fire now..? OK ...

“Mr. Fokker, please answer our question. We are formulating the question for you ... You are ... not the audience ... you are the performer, you are the artist in charge. We are just coming here to ... witness ... your ... failure. We are just coming here to witness you ... doing something really stupid ...”

... this is the whole point of the whole exhibition ... if you didn't get it by now just quit this job of interviewing us ...
“... Question #2, the audience also has ...”
What is this, like ... first class ... uhh ... Art Academy?!?

“... Theatre Life also has an audience ...” We are the audience! What don't you understand about this..?!?

PHVF OBS/VK

Interesting, to quote Johan's mail: “the less the correspondent knows in advance about the artist the better”. Now it seems that I had to understand the two of you are the audience and I misunderstood. So feeling misunderstood seems to have upset Mr. Ben Shimon and Mr. Kazachenko is afraid of failing tests.

Are the emotions that Question #2 triggered reflected in the upcoming work?

I guess so, but hey, if you guess it means you don't really know. Also great to learn I am an artist and that I have a job that I can quit. Never realized that. But no need to feel bad 'cause you already were waiting to see failure, a reflection of life itself, written down. So the artist is failing by doing his job and by looking at a failing artist during a performance you witness yourself failing as the performance is still played out in the theatre of life. Or should we say: witness yourself being alive?

That would mean that you are part of a small minority that decided not to go into the witness protection

program of life, which takes a lot of courage or naivety. Life is like an American quiz; you say the right things to the right people at the right time and you win, but sometimes not the prize you were aiming for.

MARCH 22: OBS/VK PHVF

The whole point is to obliterate the function of spectators and performers. It isn't clear who is who and what is what.

We are trying to involve the people in an alternative way, they have to feel free to be who they want to be and at the same time not. The point of the matter is that we are all in some kind of theatre all the time and its our intention to somehow make that clear to the so-called audience and be able to step out of our own shoes and be spectators of the occurring events being able to jump in and out of it at any time.

We are interested to hear how you find your position in this constellation artist-artwork-audience?

We are trying to detour this usual q&a logic, artist-audience logic, plus-minus, good-bad, right-wrong, etc. But how to do this?

We are searching for some kind of centrifugal force that will eliminate the static opposition of terms. Does that answer your answer or question your question?

PHVF OBS/VK

Hmmm, let's break this down a little...

They have to feel free to be who they want to be and at the same time not.

Clarify to the audience that they are in a theatre.

Let's call that theatre/that bordered space that life is, as an experiment: the mind.

Every time your mind comes up with something you buy a ticket to a new show/a new performance. In love? It's like being in your own Sleepless in Seattle ... Caught in a dark alley by a bunch of guys? The splatter movie starring Ordinary Joe or Jane is now playing in a mind's eye near you...

But also when you concentrate on one single thing your mind is filled with that. So people watching the performance will automatically be like-minded in a way. When they watch the performance they feel free, they are visiting out of their own free will in their spare time let's go and check out 1646 They show up and all the time they are feeling free.

They don't have a clue that they are actually caught unfree the moment they start watching the performance.

Do you want them to feel caught or free? Do you want to close the door and put a big biker dude in front of it? Do you want to give the audience an eerie feeling? What could you do yourself during the performance to give yourself an eerie feeling? In a group the feeling of angst can be created in different ways.

The mind can be influenced by using certain colour schemes (Rothko), sounds (Richard D. James), images (120 days of Sodom), etc. Turn all these examples around to try to make them feel free.

Interesting as well to look at how to eliminate the static opposition of terms.

As people are coming to 1646 that static term is already set. If you want to obliterate the function of spectators and performers you might as well just blend in with

the crowd and only let this conversation circulate in the space itself, in print and by playing our skype conversations, for example. People will at a certain point notice that the people on screen are also in the room. If we are approached by the visitors we can simply deny we are those persons, we don't even need to lie about that because change is omnipresent and the perpetuum mobile drives behind the theatre. My position in the theatre? Well I wrote a poem about it a few years ago:

Yes, life is just
a game to me, you
hear me loud and clear
like getting lost
with no directions
is an adventure without fear.
There are no stones
that build these walls,
only events in time
they fade away
like all our moments
in charity or crime.
And everything so
bloody unimportant
that it makes me smile
as do all of them
living in seriousness
for a little while.

OBS/VK PHVF

Spare time?

What's that? Is that the time we have to spare? Is there a supremacy of a specific kind of time? Mind's eye ... nice. Watching a performance as a way to free one's self? Someone else will do this job of performing an action. Did someone say master-slave? I guess there are some concerns at work when a 'performance' takes place.

There seems to be a lot of 'doing' assumptions when 1 (or 2 in our case) stands in front of many. Maybe it's not so much under our control? Maybe we want to share the control? Is that too easy? Giving control to someone else? Sounds hard. Like those exercises when you ask someone to catch you when you fall.

Blending in with the crowd is what we have in mind. We don't have any kind of designated space planned out that will be the stage and a rest-form that will be a non-stage. The omnipresent change is indeed something to take into account. Maybe this time element is quite significant. Is there such a term as theater-time?

MARCH 24: PHVF OBS/VK

Do we have to already be concerned about the concerns of us all during the spectating/performance?

I guess so, we need at least a (time) frame for ourselves. Maybe time to define the do's and don'ts. Or maybe time to define not to define the do's and don'ts at all. Catch you when you fall exercise. As in: Keep performing till the point that you don't know what to do next and than hand over the control (mic? brush? seat? stage?) to the audience: "Ok, you take it from here..." To hide in plain sight, sounds like an illuminating plan to me.

The theatre of life time is defined by death. The theatre

of consciousness time is yet undefined. If the theatre is the mind, than playing a game with the collective consciousness in the restricted area of 1646 might be a much more powerful tool as consciousness can communicate with the mind but not vice versa.

How would you create a disturbance in the collective consciousness?

OBS/VK PHVF

We are concerned with the conditions that allow us to be a *raison d'être*.

It's a concern of *corps politique*, the mechanism of production. We tap into this mechanism at different intervals of time and see what we can derive from it. These derivatives become the props with which we work, everything is circulating and evolving.

1646 is the cranium and we all are the *corpus callosum*. Though not yet determined, we fabulate upon the possible future and hope that all will be well.

We are hungry. We go eat.

MARCH 26: PHVF OBS/VK

A derivative unsigned by the visitors and signed by the makers in their own blood. "Off with their cranium!" Let them eat their part of the political body they have chosen without knowing they were making up their minds. The future withholds the fables of the present, a constant mechanism of production. You will have your piece of this pie and so will all the visitors/ spectators/ audience/ on Friday on a undisclosed location.

1646: The cafeteria of life, food for thought for the show-ups ... Be there or be elsewhere.
