

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS RESIDENT

Dieter Lesage

In the early summer of 2006 I was invited by Sarma, the online dance and dance criticism platform (www.sarma.be), to be the guest editor of an issue of Etcetera 104. This issue was to be devoted to what, in an allusion to another text of mine, I had early on begun to call "a portrait of the artist as resident". In a sense, Sarma was thus offering me a discursive residency, which residency they themselves must have got, one way or another, from Etcetera. And so at the same time I was being given the chance to offer others a discursive residency. The philosopher as discursive curator. Or was I a sub-curator, and was Sarma the curator? I didn't really know, but what I did know, or should have known, was that it wasn't going to be that easy to put together an issue with experts in the field. Indeed, they're always on the road. And as all those who are often on the road with their laptop know, even when it has all the necessary wireless software: working on a laptop never feels as good as it does at home.

Nevertheless, I explicitly wanted to invite artists – and not theoreticians – to reflect on their condition as residents, on their experiences with residencies. Theoreticians have never had the monopoly on reflection, and with this small project I wanted to invite a number of artists to reflect on themselves. The 'portrait of the artist as resident' thus turned into a 'self-portrait' really. At the same time I hope that these reflections will give theoreticians some food for thought, theoreticians who sooner or later will, of course, study the issue of artistic residencies in a more systematic and critical manner.

In dance, theatre, music and literature, and perhaps even more so in the field of the visual arts, quite a few artists rely on residencies. Indeed, a considerable number of existing art scholarships present themselves as an invitation to live and work during a certain period of time in a particular place, in a particular institution, in a studio etc. As a result, a substantial part of global artistic creativity is largely defined by conditions related to the status of the creator as 'artist in residence'. On the one hand, one can ask oneself what impact residencies, as a channel of artistic creativity, have on that creative output. On the other hand, there's the question as to what hypotheses related to artistic creativity are implied in the concept and reality of different forms of artistic residencies. Or: What kind of art do residencies deliver?

What kind of image do residencies give of art? And is there a link between the image that residencies have of art and the sort of art that gets created there?

Artists who don't create primarily with the market in mind, who want to retain a certain autonomy in their artistic productivity, find themselves relying more and more on residencies as a means of income. As a result, their autonomy is limited by the conditions attached to the residency. The very first condition attached to residencies is of course the obligation to move to a new location. In this sense, the artist in residence is first of all a migrant, or even, first had to migrate in order to then become an 'artist in residence'. At the same time, the cosmopolitan artist – so-called in so far as he or she travels from one residency to the next – is constantly pressured into tying his or her project to local issues, local themes, subjects etc. if he or she wants to have a chance of getting a residency at all. Obtaining a scholarship can depend on the language used in the application forms. An artist who can give the impression that he or she has already been on location will thus have a greater chance than the artist who admits to knowing nothing about the place in question but claims to be particularly interested.

In addition, the best grants are often for places one doesn't particularly wish to go to. In which case the question arises as to how, as an artist, one can deal with the residency and the obligations and expectations that go with it. A 'portrait of the artist as resident' thus touches on questions related to such issues as globalisation, migration, location and nationality and leads one to question such concepts as 'project', 'exchange', *in situ* art, etc. At bottom this portrait is also about life itself in its trivial and less trivial aspects. How does the artist deal with the problem of housing: getting a studio in one country is one thing, but having to leave an apartment is something else. Is it really possible to live in an artist's studio? Is a studio in fact necessary to work as an artist? In these times of digital media there are still quite a lot of residencies which vaunt the exceptional light conditions of painters's studios. There are even some residencies which guarantee no internet connection, since that would of course only distract the artist in search of quiet and inspiration. There are also residencies which in fact limit themselves to having internet connections. One then gets the impression of simply having moved from one work space to another.

During the summer I put all these questions to artists from different disciplines who each had had their own experiences with residencies. I asked them to react to these questions in the medium of their choice: a literary essay, a theoretical analysis, a poem, a song, a manifesto, a pictorial contribution. Visual artist Hito Steyerl and philosopher Boris Buden are rarely or

never at home. On their way from a residence to a conference they collaborated on a philosophical reflection on the artist as res(iden)t, in which they attempted to answer the (existential) question as to what type of subjectivity exactly gets produced by residencies. German writer Tanja Dücker will be residing at the Brussels literature house Passa Porta in the spring of 2007 and has already hit the nail on the head in "The mobile writing desk". Writers in residence often face the most remarkable expectations. Dücker namely never understood the pressure put on the writer in residence to produce literature set in the place where one is in fact residing quite by chance. German choreographer Martin Nachbar too comments on the necessity of 'being location bound' for artistic projects developed in residence. He urgently asks residencies to rethink the way they function. Dutch dramaturge Jan Ritsema considers the artist in the classic residency as nothing more than a 'dead chicken'. A radically new kind of residency is needed: a residency directed at the artist's own artistic reflections and which doesn't exist for the increase of the financial backer's honour and glory. This is what Jan Ritsema is aiming for with his PerformingArtsForum in Saint-Erme, near Laon. American visual artist Jill Magid suggests in her visual contribution how, as artist in residence, she often feels herself 'directed' by others, as if she were a satellite. Finally, Ina Wudtke, aka DJ T-Ina Darling, evokes in her songs the ambiguity of feelings brought forth by life in and between residencies: the undisguised pride at getting a fat grant overseas and the jealousy it triggers in other artists make her rap like grime-idol Dizzee Rascal, while the fear of loneliness in yet another country which one needs to get to know makes her turn back to a blues register.