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Excerpts of an interview conducted by Sara Martinetti with Ian Wilson and Michel Claura

Sara Martinetti, Michel Claura, Ian Wilson

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(advertisement)

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Exhibition extended
until 12/09

**IAN WILSON
DAVID LAMELAS
TRACES OF
SPEECH AND
TIME IN MICHEL
CLAURA'S
MISCELLANIES**

Jan Mot
Petit Sablon / Kleine Zavel 10
1000 Brussels, Belgium

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(advertisement)

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Conversation
10/09, 6:30 pm

**MICHEL CLAURA
AND ELIZE
MAZADIEGO
WHEN ART WAS
IN QUESTION**

Wiels
Avenue Van Volxemlaan 354
1190 Brussels, Belgium

(advertisement)

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Art Fair
21/09-26/09

**JAN MOT
AT
ART BASEL**

Hall 2.1 Booth L15
Messeplatz Basel (CH)

(advertisement)

240

Exhibition
06/10-20/11
Opening
02/10, 4-7 pm

**DOMINIQUE
GONZALEZ-
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ASTROCYTES**

Jan Mot
Petit Sablon / Kleine Zavel 10
1000 Brussels, Belgium

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Excerpts of an interview conducted by Sara Martinetti with Ian Wilson and Michel Claura

BRUSSELS, MAY 12, 2017

SARA MARTINETTI. Do you remember what was your project for the exhibition organized by Michel and the related catalogue entitled *18 Paris II/70* [New York: Seth Siegelau, 1970]?

IAN WILSON. The project was—as I said in the catalogue—to meet Michel and explain my work with oral communication. Afterwards we made another statement to go into the thing [catalogue]—that Ian Wilson came and he talked about this [“I. My project will be to visit you in Paris, April 1970 and there make clear the idea of oral communication as art form. II. Ian Wilson came to Paris in January 1970 and talked about the idea of oral communication as art form.” from the catalogue]. We didn’t publish anything. That was what I wanted.

SM. It was the beginning of a long collaboration.

IW. For some reason I guess, it’s because Michel was very active. He did a number of things with me. He was always very obliging. I would come to Europe—for exhibitions in Germany maybe—and come to Paris and I would say to Michel: “I need to do a work... We need to set up a *Discussion*.” He would say: “What? Why?”—“Well, because I need to...” At the time, I kind of needed to formalize my work. It was not clear. “I need to have a situation where I can talk to people.” I didn’t really know how... And he said: “Let’s do that.” And he would think of a place and he would invite a lot of people, like Café de la Monnaie [Group discussion organized by Michel Claura, Café de la Monnaie, Paris, December 1, 1970]. And before I knew it, I was standing in front of a lot of people making a *Discussion*. He was very obliging. If I would just open my mouth and say a few words, he would say: “Ok, let’s do it. Let’s do it. Let’s do it.” We ended up once in Milano [Group discussion organized by Michel Claura, Albergo Rosa, Milan, December 12, 1970]. I said something... I don’t how we ended up in Milano... But anyway, that’s an example.

SM. Has there been, in your career, someone playing an equivalent role as Michel’s?

IW. No. Well... Michel was... Michel was... It’s a much more personal relationship. It has always been much more personal. He would get a bed from his parents’ place so that I could sleep in his apartment. Whereas with someone like Rudi Fuchs [director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven from 1975 to 1987, director of the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague from 1987 to 1993, director of Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam from 1993 to 2003]... Rudi Fuchs was always very business, you know. I would go, come to the museum... He was very accommodating. If I was coming to Europe, I would say: “Hey Rudi, can I do a *Discussion* in the museum?”—“Ok, let’s do that.” I would not even see him after that. He would just tell the people from the museum: “Ian should do a *Discussion*.” It was very different with Michel. I used to consider Michel... call him “the keeper of the keys of the gates of Paris”. Right Michel? It was the only way that I could get to Paris. Galleries, finally, didn’t want to touch me because Michel had sort of totally taken over, you know. It was just the way it was.

MICHEL CLAURA. I did not know that I prevented you from going anywhere else.

IW. I like to... It’s an excuse I give. Anyway, it is a nice excuse.

[...]

SM. Can we talk about the curatorial approach to your work comparing Michel and Seth Siegelau [1941–2013]? [The latter collaborated with the artist for, among others: Carl Andre, Michael Cain (Pulsa), Douglas Huebler, Seth Siegelau (mod.), Ian Wilson, *Time: A Panel Discussion*, Discussion series Issues in Art, Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, Public Theater, New York. March 17, 1969; published as “Time: A Panel Discussion,” *Art International* 8, no. 9 (November 1969); 20–23, 39.] They were close friends and worked together for some exhibitions and publications. Maybe Michel wants to say something.

MC. I have nothing to say because you are asking about me. I don’t see the difference between me and the others except that we are not alike. I mean... [Laughs]

IW. It is a good question. How did I find a difference? How was I able to relate more with you and the structures that you presented me than with Seth and his projects?

MC. I don’t know but I would tend to say that, as far as I am concerned, I believe I have always given a maximum of freedom to you...

IW. Yes.

MC. ...and whoever. But by the same token, to my knowledge, Seth was just doing the same in terms of giving freedom to the people. No?

IW. Well, I think that the difference between Seth and Michel was that Seth always approached me with a structure. He has structure, you know. The “One month of artist” [Seth Siegelau ed. *March 1969* [*One Month*]. New York: Seth Siegelau, 1969] was a structure. The group show [*January 5–31, 1969*. McLendon Building, 44 East Fifty-Second Street, New York, January 5–31, 1969. With Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner. Ian Wilson refused to participate] was in a gallery: it was a structure. At the time of that group show, I really didn’t know how... I was too fresh. With Michel, I would go to him and say: “Ok, Michel, I have vague ideas. I want to... Maybe there is a way that I talk to people in Paris about oral communication, for example.” He would say: “Sure, let’s have a meeting in a café.” He would quickly put me into a context, but I would initiate the thing. Seth would come from the other way. He would say: “You’ve got to be in a café.” I guess I didn’t relate so well with that. I kind of like the thing that Michel did. He was open to any context. Actually, he was the one I couldn’t keep up with. Because I would say something like: “I would like to have a *Discussion*”, he would say: “Ok, let’s go to Milano and you can have a *Discussion* in a hotel lobby.” He would come up with crazy ideas. “What’s this hotel lobby?” We ended up in Milano

in a hotel lobby, or a café. But anyway, in this way, he was very fluid. Presenting a much more fluid medium for me to work than Seth... [...] Michel was a bit like a racehorse. I had to hold him back a lot. He would do things like, saying: "Let's have a *Discussion* in this old place." For some reason, through his work [as a lawyer], he would know all sorts of real estate that existed, you know. He would say: "You could do a *Discussion* in this place. It is an empty space. Some kind of real estate..." I would say: "Wait. Wait a minute. Wait a minute". He would say something like: "We do a *Discussion* in a café." I would say: "Wait, wait, wait. A café... Wait, wait, wait." I am thinking about art world—about galleries, you know—and he would say: "Do it in a café!" [Laughs]

SM. Is the place an important parameter in a *Discussion* or is it random?

IW. No. Yes... When he said café to me, I said to myself: "Café? This is..." I am used to the art world. Here is Michel saying: "Get out of the art world, move around, loosen up!" Konrad Fischer [1939–1996] would say: "Let's go to this opening here." Michel was saying: "No, no, no. Get out of the art world. Do something outside the art world. Expand a bit." That took a little bit of digesting on my part.

[...]

SM. Please let me know about the steps of organizing a *Discussion*, once the place was found.

MC. Not much... Just sending out the announcements. I think that we always had a sort of a briefing between both of us before starting, so I would know more or less where you wanted to go. That was not a very long job. We were spending—what—45 minutes discussing what would be the topic? So, easy.

SM. On average, how many announcements did you send and how many people attended?

MC. By memory, I would say 150, 200 maximum. The attendance was between minimum 15 persons up to seventy-eighty. Maison des Centraux [Group discussion organized by Michel Claura, Maison des Centraux, Paris, May 10, 1976] was very much attended, probably because a few people heard about what they had missed and didn't want to miss that one. At Pompidou [Group discussion organized by Michel Claura, Centre Pompidou, Paris,

October 26, 2005], there was like 80 persons in the auditorium. It was a different setting.

SM. Did you design the announcements?

MC. Yes. Did I submit it to you? Probably.

SM. I found out in the archive that Michel wrote the addresses on the envelopes.

MC. Certainly. I put the stamps as well and paid for them.

IW. [Laughs] He was very practical. I needed someone who was practical.

SM. What were the topics of the *Discussions*?

IW. The known and unknown. Parmenides [pre-Socratic Greek philosopher]... But it was always the relationship with the known and unknown. I remember I used to say: "If the unknown is known as unknown..." I used to say something like: "If the unknown is known as unknown, it is not just unknown. It must be both known and unknown." And then people would respond to that. [...] The

relationship to the known and unknown took like 10 years, I think. You know, at one point, I was quite skeptical... I was quite a skeptic about knowledge.

Michel Claura is a French art critic and exhibition organizer that started his activities in 1967.

Sara Martinetti is a French researcher whose work crosses the anthropology of writing, art history, and theory of craft. She publishes books and curates exhibitions, a.o. the research report Michel Claura: Code vestimentaire. Les fruits déguisés ne seront pas acceptés. De quelques insertions dans un moment de l'art peu vêtu and Trois actes d'écriture de Michel Claura entre 1973 et 1982 (Paris, Centre national des arts plastiques and Bibliothèque Kandinsky/Centre Pompidou, 2019) and the article "Trois actes d'écriture de Michel Claura entre 1973 et 1982" (Les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne, n° 156, summer 2021, p. 30-58).

Full-length version of this interview to be published.



For her exhibition *VOLCANIC EXCURSION (A VISION)* at Secession in Vienna, **Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster** presents a monumental pictorial collage representing 235 life-size figures from past and present times. The artist describes this condensed environment as a "fictional trans feminist and antiracist excursion" gathering "inspiring friends, non-binary, trans, queer, fluid, hybrid, lesbian, gay, pan, humans and non-humans". The piece was inspired by the contrast she observed between the lock-down isolation and the many crowded protests, demonstrations and marches that took place recently in Paris. Through this 24 meters-wide and 5 meters-tall panoramic tableau, she refers, among others, to Gustave Klimt's iconography as well as Diego Rivera's mural *Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central (Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda Central, 1946-47)*. On view till September 5th, the installation performs as an engaging, optimistic stage for the visitor's active engagement. (Courtesy Secession, Vienna. Photo: Oliver Ottenschaeger)