

## HADLEY+MAXWELL / Dear Brian, and Verb List Compilations 1967-8 & 2010

Berlin, November 1, 2010

Dear Brian,

Today is the deadline and we have made the decision not to write a manifesto for your issue of *The Capilano Review*. We don't have it in us. We're fairly certain that this is not a time for manifestos anymore, and we've come to think this is because we actually understand the relationship between language and action quite differently now than in 1908 when the Futurists wrote that first, frightening, art manifesto. Let us try to explain.

There is a piece by Claire Fontaine that comes as close to a contemporary manifesto as anything we've read. It's got all the signs of a manifesto: the imperatives, the confidence, the idealism—however there is something missing. When we compare it to those early avant-garde texts like the Vorticist, Constructivist, or any of the Dadaist manifestos, the affect is completely different. There is a quality of earnestness in the early texts that doesn't come across any longer. We are simply not convinced that Claire Fontaine really believes their own text will incite anything. This is not merely an element of this particular artist-collective's style; we think it is a symptom of the current state of artistic discourse. Have we become so split from our own production that we cannot desire what we write any longer? Or is it that we no longer misrecognize the potentiality in the means of artistic production, of writing, or the apparatus of language in general? Claire Fontaine describe the aporia between desire and linguistic imperative beautifully in the manifesto itself: "Explaining what human strike is, how to map it, how to articulate it, is like giving a technical lesson of sexual education to the person we wish to seduce."<sup>1</sup>

These older manifestos don't have this problem, in fact they act as a kind of nostalgic haven of passion. They declare, proclaim, admit, sing, establish, affirm, renounce, start, consider, take, submit, want, propose, and dispute. They say: We are resolved,

<sup>1</sup> Claire Fontaine, "Human strike has already begun," in *The End of the World As We Know It*, ed. Bettina Steinbrügge (France: La Kunsthalle Mulhouse, 2010).

We are justified, We await, We call for, We demand, and We need. Before World War I, they glorified violence. After World War I, they renounced manifestos that glorified violence. To glorify and renounce: these are verbs we do not use in the arts right now—at least not with straight faces. And maybe we can't read the century-old manifestos with straight faces either, but we are still impressed by the pure determination of "Drunk with energy, we are revenants thrusting the trident into heedless flesh. We are streams of curses in the tropical abundance of vertiginous vegetation, resin and rain is our sweat, we bleed and burn with thirst, our blood is strength."<sup>2</sup> Belief is intoxicating.

So instead of a manifesto we're sending you two lists in hopes that the difference between the two will bring to light something of the historical mutation of the relationship between language and action we're thinking about. The first is Richard Serra's *Verb List Compilation: Actions to Relate to Oneself* from 1967-8. The second is a list we compiled recently from verbs commonly used in press-releases and artist statements; we've called it *Verb List Compilation II: Actions to Relate to Actions to Relate to Oneself*. The idea is that one may combine Serra's list with ours to describe contemporary strategies for art production. For example, you can roll something to explore it, or crease to articulate it; you can shave to reveal something or crumple to deconstruct it.<sup>3</sup> We started to compile our (updated) list a few years ago when we were first receiving multiple announcements from e-flux every day in our inbox. The point being that the current state of art discourse manages to turn many actions into end-games, where deconstruction is a necessary justification for crumpling, for example, and we feel like this collection of possible combinations that make up the actions of art is a fair reflection of how language is used—for better or for worse—to articulate material practice today. Either the press release represents the common use of language that represses the contemporary manifesto (because of its overabundant and indiscriminate declarations), or it is the site of the new manifesto. Until it makes us feel like we were just cut from a marble block and we're ready to fuck the artist who freed us, we're not ready to write it in another form.

Yours sincerely,

Hadley+Maxwell

<sup>2</sup> Tzara, Tristan, "Dada Manifesto," 1918, in Chipp, Herschel B., *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> As Monica Sosnowska's 1:1 did in the Polish pavilion at the Venice Biennale, 2007.

Richard Serra, "Verb List Compilation: Actions to Relate to Oneself"  
[1967-1968]

to roll	to curve	to scatter	to modulate
to crease	to lift	to arrange	to distill
to fold	to inlay	to repair	of waves
to store	to impress	to discard	of electromagnetic
to bend	to fire	to pair	of inertia
to shorten	to flood	to distribute	of ionization
to twist	to smear	to surfeit	of polarization
to dapple	to rotate	to compliment	of refraction
to crumple	to swirl	to enclose	of tides
to shave	to support	to surround	of reflection
to tear	to hook	to encircle	of equilibrium
to chip	to suspend	to hole	of symmetry
to split	to spread	to cover	of friction
to cut	to hang	to wrap	to stretch
to sever	to collect	to dig	to bounce
to drop	of tension	to tie	to erase
to remove	of gravity	to bind	to spray
to simplify	of entropy	to weave	to systematize
to differ	of nature	to join	to refer
to disarrange	of grouping	to match	to force
to open	of layering	to laminate	of mapping
to mix	of felting	to bond	of location
to splash	to grasp	to hinge	of context
to knot	to tighten	to mark	of time
to spill	to bundle	to expand	of cabonization
to droop	to heap	to dilute	to continue
to flow	to gather	to light	

Found on ubuweb: <[http://www.ubu.com/concept/serra\\_verb.html](http://www.ubu.com/concept/serra_verb.html)>

Hadley+Maxwell: "Verb List 2: Actions to Relate to Actions to Relate to One's Audience"  
[2010]

to explore	to work out	to communicate	to draw attention to
to articulate	to work through	to refer to	to assume
to experiment	to work in	to appropriate	to disseminate
to uncover	to work at	to expropriate	to connect
to reveal	to work on	to antagonize	to imagine
to describe	to position	to agonize	to allow
to compare	to compose	of discourse	to elucidate
to create	to react to	of dialogue	to propagate
to deconstruct	to reveal	of belief	to explicate
to construct	to hide	of conversation	to interpret
to confuse	to uncover	of tolerance	to mediate
to orient	to orient	of diversity	to state
to disorient	to demonstrate	to negotiate	to karaoke
to formulate	to illuminate	to engage	to connect
to propose	to use	to categorize	to strategize
to stimulate	to put to use	to reject	of conversion
to offer	to make use of	to summarize	of diversion
to consider	to renovate	to juxtapose	of faith
to focus	to frustrate	to illustrate	of relation
to gather	to make room for	to challenge	to devote
to preserve	to seek	to interrogate	to organise
to deem	to see	to deal with	to direct
to qualify	to look	to investigate	to invite
to quantify	to get at	to penetrate	to narrate
to pose	to relate with	to home in on	to employ
to question	to relate to	to mount	to reconsider
to transform	to relate	to conceive	