

## The Journey

**Juanli Carrión** - Artist

**Jonathan Durham** - Director of Visual Arts Abrons Arts Center

**Adrian Geraldo Saldaña** - Curator *Parts and Labor*

**Maia Murphy** - Program Manager Recess

**Allison Weisberg** - Executive Director & Founder Recess

**From:** <juanlicarrion@gmail.com>,

**Subject:** The Journey

**Date:** 9 october 2011 11:54:56AM EDT

**To:** Allison Weisberg <allison@recessactivities.org> Adrian Saldana <agsaldana@gmail.com>, Maia Murphy <maia@recessactivities.org>, csickles@henrystreet.org

I just came back home after watching John Akomfrah's *The Nine Muses* at MoMA. The movie is a really poetic and beautiful piece talking about immigration and human adaptation taking the idea of The Journey as a central line.

I was watching the movie and inevitably my mind started to think in "The Project" even before the first credits finished.

The first quote in the movie makes me write in my notebook the following: "EACH DAY IS A JOURNEY AND THE JOURNEY ITSELF IS HOME" Matsuo Bashô

The artist practice as a journey... which ends in the show of the results... results as memories of the journey. Is art the journey? Or, is what comes at the end of the journey?

The artist is alone at the beginning of the journey, and during it others join him (curators, institutions, producers, galleries, friends, sponsors, buyers, critics...) The more people you begin to meet on the journey the closer to the end you are. Once the journey is over art becomes a "ruin" the trace of something that is no longer.

*Bulding the Neverending Ruin of the World* wants to demonstrate how the Internet and the exclusion of the experience (of the image) is changing our perception and our journey trough life.

We as individuals can create a vision of the world, our life is the journey in which this vision is built. Nowadays our vision is polluted by the filters that designates what our vision should be. This is a project that talks about this "experience" thought image apparently neutral and uncurated in Internet, but where is this "neutrality" going to bring us.

**From:** Jonathan Durham <durham7@gmail.com>

**Subject: Re: The Journey Date:** 7 October 2011 08:16:42AM EDT

Hi Everyone,

Just to toss a few responses in the air, I think it is clear that to realize Juanli's project, he must employ the work of several administrators, as well as the tools that (hopefully) are at their disposal. Desks, computers, wireless connections, Skype, video projectors, print outs, web cams - all office tools that an artist would see as standard issue for an art administrator or gallery office. And by extension artist panels, lectures, and "events" would fall into this category and I would imagine that the more the better would be in Juanli's best interes.

This for me - in terms of the notions you set forth of "plural roles and voices," goes straight to an economic idea of how an artist may operate and how they may conceive of an exhibition in the alternative spaces in which we work. This is also I believe more particularly true for an artist who moves his/her studio from space to space - residency to residency with no fixed location. I was having this thought while we were at the ISCP mixer - the

thought that all the artists here have in some way agreed to work with administrations at the most basic level of just having a space to work. That is - the artists have accepted the condition to a large degree that to make their work they need the acceptance and support of a program with formal applications procedures, review panels, etc - a filtering and at times homogenizing process. This is basically an economic decision made by poor artists. This includes myself as an artist and administrator who has participated on numerous sides of this process.

I think Juanli's project and the connections of administrative/exhibition spaces and programs has to do with a kind of connection of voids, or a connection between blank spaces. The Google search for ruins is a passive activity and is properly referential to earthwork artists who have used the landscape as a site outside of the gallery space that that is somehow captured/organized/surveyed/mapped and represented by categorical methods back in the gallery. The focus on the Google algorithm as "the parameter" touches on our passive mode of communicating and exploring virtual space. It also just has to do with economics, advertising and popularity - things that allow Google to thrive.

But there is really no where to go with this process other than to enjoy the process. The technology sets up the integers and parameters in such an extremely limited way that conceptually this project is really no different from someone searching for the top 6 best selling pieces of lumber and cutting them based on where they land in the list.

There is actually a huge amount of material that one can search for that would never have the privilege of being processed algorithmically. To take Mark Leckey's search for bear negligee in his piece *The Long Tail* for example.

-jonathan

**From:** Allison Weisberg [allison@recessactivities.org](mailto:allison@recessactivities.org)

**Subject: Re: The Journey Date:** 7 October 2011 1:24:49PM EDT

Thanks, Jonathan. I think it's helpful to consider the roving nature of artists and artworks as a condition thrust upon them by economic parameters, rather than one selected and cultivated. The mundane action of applying to residency programs, and the complementary administrative component of facilitating the work, connect nicely to the algorithmic computation raised in Juanli's *Never-ending Ruins*.

That said, there was an intentionality to Juanli's active application process here. Juanli was adamant about the multiplicity of voices, and he was certain Recess needed to be part of this dialogue. The involvement of the three institutions (Abrons, Artium and Recess) augments the slippage of the Juanli's own role of artist into that of the administrator.

I have been suspicious at times, that this was some kind of performance on Juanli's part--a desire to render elastic the distance between disparate points on his mapped ruins. Whether this performance is intentional--and I have decided it is not--the performative aspect of producing this sprawling project is exciting, if not challenging to me.

Recess often thinks of itself as an artist collaborating with other artists rather than a curatorial platform. Tamar Ettun, an Israeli artist Recess is working with for Performa, recently pointed out to me that young art historians and theorists hate calling themselves curators. While I think many still enjoy the title, there is a movement away from defined scopes, and Juanli has capitalized on the unmoored players of the contemporary arts.

**From:** Adrian Saldana <agsaldana@gmail.com>  
**Subject: Re: The Journey Date:** 9 October 2011 11:54:56AM EDT

Thanks Allison and Jonathan,

Very good points raised. I connect Juanli's efforts - performance as Allison put it - with the process-based practices seen famously in the 1960's. His digital search for ruins and the resulting works adopt the elements of accumulation and improvisation, while remaining wholly rational and intentional. Juanli's scheduled use of Skype in his gallery-residency between Abrons and Artium has a lineage in part to works like Bruce Nauman's "Flour Arrangements", where the artist committed himself to pushing piles of flour each day for over a month, and especially in his more recent "Mapping the Studio (Fat Chance John Cage)", recording the late night non-activity of his studio.

One important distinction between that era and now is the shift in the political economy of cultural production in New York. The realization of artwork has shifted from an amorphous "artist community" to today's numbers of individuals operating through institutions, be it the 501(c)3, the commercial gallery, the museum, or the art foundation. This speaks to the commodification of space (studio and gallery) into luxury, the rising costs of living and healthcare, and the debt acquired from receiving an education in fine arts. An artist whose practice was completely independent from institutional support for space and materials would operate with a great deal of independent wealth. (All topics currently raised by the Occupy Wall Street protests in downtown Manhattan.)

As such, there is an interesting transaction that occurs between the "unmoored players of contemporary arts". Where do the resources of Allison and Maia end and those of Recess begin? How does Abrons' mission get met versus the aspirations of Jonathan, Carolyn, and Adrian? The same for Blanca and Artium. As administrators we develop an infrastructure for cultural programming but at the same time operate as individuals with creative pursuits - artmaking, curating, collaborating. "..."

Also, Jonathan, I am quite intrigued by your proposal to search for the top six best selling pieces of lumber and cutting them based on where they land in the list. While rooted in the mathematics Google's search algorithm, that and Juanli's process evoke a type of alchemy - assigning value and meaning to the alloy that rises to the surface.

-Adrian

**From:** <juanlicarrion@gmail.com>,  
**Subject: Re: The Journey Date:** 9 October 2011 11:54:56AM EDT

Hello everybody and Happy Columbus day...

It has been very rewarding to read you all. Here are some opinions about some of your points and some new things I may have never said before about the project.

I think we are all on the same page when talking about the process: obviously Recess is, as we can read in its mission, Jonathan is saying it very clear in his e-mail, Blanca is too since she is doing Praxis, and Adrian is curating the project in his show. Talking about myself, this has been one of my biggest concerns in the last 4 years, and (acknowledging Allison's concerns about the possibility of a covert performance), I have big issues about how the art world is digesting the practice through the generation of objects, shows, criticisms, etc. In all my projects there is a complete intention to question the actual formats of art presentation, as I think Allison and Maia were able to realize in the book launch that took place at Recess some time ago. Here, my role as

an artist is also becoming something of an administrator since I am poor and I cannot pay someone else to do it for me and also because I am the kind of artist that likes to have complete control of the development of the project. In this case the parameters of the project are very important to their conceptual development and thus even more involved on an administrative level.

Now I want to explain the chronology of everything in this project: as an artist, besides my need to do projects I think one of my primary goals is to communicate the ideas that cross my mind, and it is here when, as Jonathan said, as poor artists we need the containers and the institutions in order to be able to show all of this process. It is also true that it is in the hand of the artist, or at least in mine, to try to approach those spaces that I think are closest to my ideas and processes. And this can be a game with two players or more. In this case I was invited to be a part of Praxis, because Blanca thinks my work fits with the statement of the program. I don't work by pre-order, so I proposed to her to develop this project, which I had been researching for about a year at that point. Due to the characteristics of the project, the need to develop it in at least two places was obvious, and which better places than where the show was taking place and the city where I work and live. That was what made me start looking for a container where I could develop the project, ultimately approaching Recess. My interest was strong, as Allison has noted, for even if as the artist we most often don't have the power to select where we are going to show our work, I try my best to do it in the places I think are most appropriate.

I don't think the act of applying for residencies is mundane, and I agree with Allison's comment when she says that the Google algorithm can also be found in the process of selection when we apply for residencies, grants, etc. It is my belief, and I think I can speak for all of us, that the commercial value of our practice (artistic, curatorial, editorial, etc) is not at all the most significant thing, so we find each other in order to create something together. In this case, as Jonathan said, I as the artist am giving contents for spaces, Abrons and Artium are giving a physical blank space to be filled, and Recess is giving reinforcement by taking part of the publication and the public program, which I think is the ideal format to continue our discussion in the public realm. This is a project which takes the form of a performance (residency) in a group show in a nonprofit institution that becomes a solo show in a museum, which will result in some images and objects.

When an artist creates a piece in his or her studio the result of their process--their piece--is then shown in a container. Here, by moving the creative process into the containers, they become part of the artistic practice, building upon Allison's perspective of Recess as an artist collaborating with other artists.

I like the note of Adrian referring to the project as having parts involved with the 60's, and he makes an important point citing the difference in the political economy in the city of New York that in my opinion applies to all of Western culture. But prefer to say, connecting with Allison, that the limits of personal and corporate goals are blurred and sometimes uncontrolled.

But lets focus on the content of the project itself. In the specific case of *Bulding the Neverending Ruin of the World* I am questioning the filters of information within the art world that appear in Google. It does matter conceptually the fact that I am looking up the word Ruin inside an art institution (Abrons) and a Museum (Artium) in two different locations geographically and conceptually speaking, since the Google algorithm takes this parameter as one of the most significant when offering us the results of our search.

I definitely think that this is an experiment in which every part is going to find its own results.

Juanli.

**From:** Maia <maia.k.murphy@gmail.com>

**Subject: Re: The Journey Date:** 16 October 2011 3:31:37PM EDT

Hi everyone,

It's been wonderful reading these collected thoughts so far. Just wanted to toss a few more into the ether.

I'm writing to you from JFK, a waiting room in another airport, from a train and then a hotel. During patches of wifi and in-between jet lag. Alternating between jotting down ideas on paper and entering notes to myself in a gmail draft. My point is not to hijack this thread into my personal travelogue, but to illustrate the paradox of a type of communication we employ today. Is this incredibly active, to record thoughts while traveling great distances in time and space, or is it very passive, to put down and pick up in fits and spurts.

Google itself is incredibly active. It sifts through millions of sites, a wreckage of time compressed to present a semi-curated collection of information. However, our typical interaction with it, as users, is passive. Juanli is taking a passive activity, Google image searching, and rendering it active, taking an image and printing it, archiving it. Creating a museum and gallery show and publication around it. Rendering the digital into analog. The images he finds today may be less relevant than those he finds tomorrow, or those he finds a country over from the one he is in now, at least according to Google's algorithms. The ruins he works with will become ruins once again.

Reading through the past communication and considering the slippage of artist into administrator I'm reminded of a story I heard recently of Alana Heiss, organizing Under The Brooklyn Bridge (1971), a milestone in her career. The show literally took place under the bridge, a space that was then a forgotten, unused and dirty corner of the city. She sought permission from city hall to organize the event in this location, but ran into trouble when they declined to grant it on the basis that it was an art show. Out on a technicality. When she changed nothing, but pretended that the project was the set of a movie shoot, permission was granted. A performance to seek administrative compliance, and to organize what went down in memory as a great show.

Looking forward to more

Maia

**From:** <juanlicarrion@gmail.com>,

**Subject: Re: The Journey Date:** 19 October 2011 2:56PM

Hello all,

I have to send the text to the translator on Friday morning, that means that tomorrow I will edit the text and send it to you on Thursday for your approval. Would be great if you have something else to say ( not necessary a long e-mail... maybe a simple sentence, a word, a link...)

From my part I just want to say that I really think Maia's idea of the Google's result as ruins it is completely right. We could say that I am materializing one of this virtual ruins, a series of object that are going to talk through a aesthetic exercise the hierarchy existing in the internet based in this case in language and location. A ruin that will talk about how Internet is not the democratic public sphere that we think it is.

Looking forward to read more of you.

Cheers!

**From:** Allison Weisberg <allison@recessactivities.org>  
**Subject: Re: The Journey Date:** 19 October 2011 4:25:39PM EDT

Hi all,

Here's one last crack. I'm glad Maia's jetlag led us to discuss this project in terms of time (implicit in any conversation about place). As Maia flew across the ocean, communicating not just in new places, but in new time zones and their respective states of active and passive positions, I started thinking about Terry Smith's term contemporaneity, which he coins in Antinomies of Art and Culture. Smith takes on the multiplicity of "nows" in our contemporary moment: "Contemporaneity consists precisely in acceleration, ubiquity, and constancy of radical disjunctures of perception, of mismatching ways of seeing and valuing the same world, in the actual coincidence of asynchronous temporalities, in the jostling contingency of various cultural and social multiplicities, all thrown together in ways that highlight the fast-growing inequalities within and between them." This layered chaos that Smith so elegantly describes is exactly the kind that Juanli invited when he conceived of this project and then compounded when asked so many players to join in its realization.

In fact, it is only in the context of "asynchronous temporalities" that this project makes sense at all. Again I'm convinced that performance plays a large role in the contemporaneity at work here. I'm referring to Juanli's performance in actively curating his producers, and our own in initiating the conceit of writing an essay in the form of an email chain. As Maia was writing on the train on the way to the hotel, Adrian's earlier question, "Where do the resources of Allison and Maia end and those of Recess begin?" comes back into play. The stakes of this question are heightened when you think of Allison and Maia as performers. I guess I'll add a when here too: when—in the contemporaneity of the present moment—do the resources of the individual end and those of the organization begin?

Onward,  
Afw

**From:** Jonathan Durham <durham7@gmail.com>  
**Subject: Re: The Journey Date:** 19 October 2011 6:11:01PM EDT

The resources of the individual end *when* that individual chooses to request the resources of others rather than pay for the resources of others. In this case the request is made to use other organizations resources mainly because the resources requested are generic - computers and thumb drives are moving in the same sea of press releases, texts, and email chains that make up the morass that we "administrators" know as work. It is significant that these resources are considered shared because they come from non-profits. There is an effort with the project to buy nothing and salvage everything which I think again comes from a point and time and position in the economy where an artist needs to make every effort to float over this morass light-stepping where they must in order to produce the contemporary look of an installation.

- Jonathan

**From:** Allison Weisberg <allison@recessactivities.org>  
**Subject: Re: The Journey Date:** 19 October 2011 6:29:38PM EDT

But this question of resources is complicated by the fact that Recess isn't contributing anything physical. Spread thin with several projects programmed long before Juanli approached us, our resources are more nebulous. What is being shared--rendered communal--by the nonprofit structure? Jonathan, I think you're on to something when you say the artist strives to produce the "contemporary look of an installation." I have a hunch that this *contemporary look*, is authenticated not only by computers and thumb drives, but also by the multiple points of interest (both temporal and spatial) on which Juanli is capitalizing.

**For:** Jonathan Durham <durham7@gmail.com>  
**Subject: Re: The Journey Date:** 20 de octubre de 2011 17:19:16 EDT

Yes. The "contemporary look of an installation" would consist of whatever mode of information storage and transfer is appropriate for the moment. Whatever wish fulfillment portal (Skype) is most used at the time. And the broadest sweep of potential players in the production of the exhibition to give the project a global "feel." And I agree with you Allison that this is basically performative.

The resources you are lending are the further authentication of this project's scope by having Recess attached. This is not so much about physical resources but more about logos, text, talk and recognition. Recognition being the most important for Juanli, for Google, and for the images produced.  
jd

**From:** <juanlicarrion@gmail.com>,  
**Subject: Re: The Journey Date:** 19 October 2011 2:56PM

Unfortunately there is a deadline for this text, since we have to print it and have it ready for the opening of the show.

This conversation seems to me like the beginning of something else, like the introduction of a much longer debate that could be continued in the public program that will take place in December.

As a conclusion I would like to "pause" this virtual conversation by saying that what is going to be printed is an edited version of our conversation for two reasons: first because of the limit of space (since we just have a certain amount of pages for this text) and second, to try to focus the attention on which I think are the most relevant subjects for the project itself (using here one more time my self-determination as administrator/editor/curator/artist).

Jonathan, I think in the last e-mails you are flying just on the surface of this project's subjects of interest. First, I think the authentication of which you speak between artist and institution would be reciprocal (if there is any authentication at all, which I don't believe is the case). As Allison said, it is a total matter of space and time here. I think it is important to revisit here the meaning that an artist has to an institution, and conversely an institution's significance to an artist. Without a space and time to show his work, an artist can "create" as much as he wants, but without the exposure of this work the art process is incomplete from my point of view, as art for me is a means of communication, and communication requires at least two participants. So yes, I want my work to be viewed, or "authenticated" as you said, as much as possible. But there is no recognition or validation involved here in any direction. That said, one of the many intentions of this project does involve a questioning of the physicality of institutions in the "contemporary" way of showing art.

Thank you very much to all for your valuable contributions and for participating in this experiment with me.