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BIO Fake Industries Architectural Agonism (Cristina Goberna and Urtzi Grau) is an architectural office of diffuse boundaries and questionable taste that explores the power of replicas, in the double sense denoted in romance languages—both as literal copies of existing works, and as agonistic responses to previous statements—for the advancement of the field. Goberna and Grau currently teach at Columbia University (GSAPP), Cooper Union, and the Princeton University School of Architecture.

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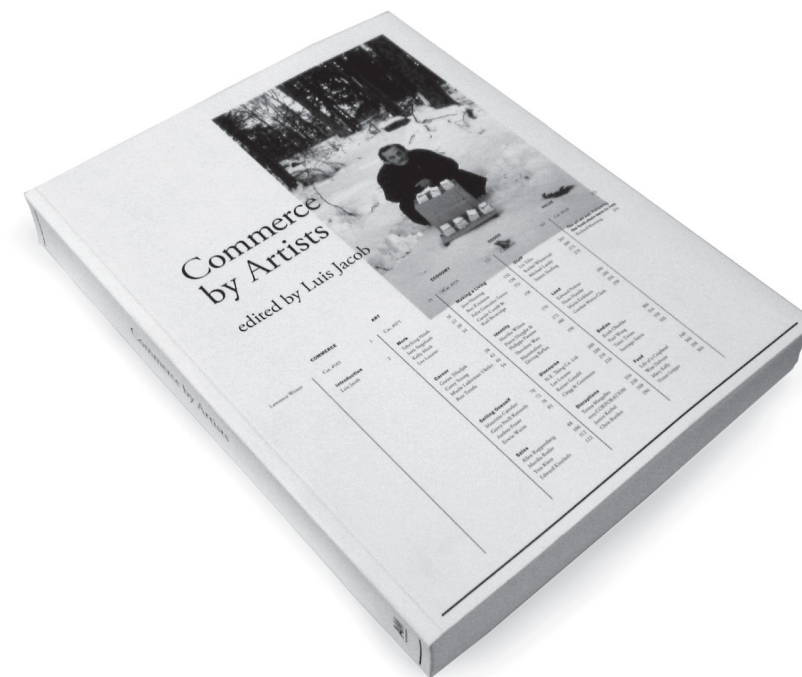
*Commerce by Artists*

ED. LUIS JACOB, TORONTO: ART METROPOLE, 2011, 386 PP.

review by Allan Antliff

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Art has long been a framework for radical agency, as attested by the rich history of artists' movements seeking to mobilize creativity for revolutionary ends. Art's conditions of production and its function under existing socio-economic systems (or future imaginaries yet to be realized) have been critiqued, experimented with, subverted, or otherwise transformed, and the process shows no signs of letting up. *Commerce by Artists* explores art's expansion into the realm of economics, specifically focusing on relationships of exchange that are rife with

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counter-capitalist promise. Editor Luis Jacob's introduction lays the groundwork. Announcing that he wants to "concentrate on artists' projects that do not so much represent commercial transactions as they *enact* them," he serves notice that his anthology deals with sites of engagement, where "the artistic project *itself* takes the form of a transaction of some kind."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, Jacob's anthology is all about loosening up capitalism's ideological hold on the concept of exchange. What the artists do with that project varies widely; however, they find common cause in the conviction that, as Argentinian artist Victor Grippo puts it, "artistic activity is not an activity." Instead,

It is a state that conduces to a way of life that is different from the conventional way, that is consciously incarnate later on. Then a decision has to be made, and, correspondingly, the decision is important, whether you are going to continue living this way, or not. Then one should assume a responsibility. And all the products that you go along differentiating, and the things that you get rid of, and the expressions that derive from this particular way of living will go on to be called artworks.<sup>2</sup>

Documentary selections are elegantly organized into four primary categories—"Art," "Economy," "Goods," and "Value"—each of which generates its own unique subsections (for example, "work," "career," "selling oneself," and "sales" are grouped under "Art"). The editorial touch is light: Jacob reproduces photographic and print documentation of the artists' works, sometimes with a related article, without comment, letting each piece and/or accompanying essay speak for itself. To this end his choices are highly nuanced, critically honed, and, as befits Jacob's anarchist politics, supremely engaged. To take one example, the "disruptions" subsection of "Economy" includes an article on Mexican artist Terresa Margolles's forensically preserved "ready-made" sculpture, *Lengua (Tongue)* (2000), extracted from the corpse of a drug war victim and acquired through an exchange with the diseased man's impoverished family—body part traded for coffin to enable a

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decent burial. Unpacking how the artist exploits the bureaucratic machinations of the Mexican legal system that force this bargain on the family (a coffin gives them the right to claim the remains for burial; without it, the body becomes property of the state and is dumped into a common grave or used as a practice corpse in a medical school), the author tracks the tongue's subsequent elevation as art object, from exhibition in a high-end commercial gallery in California to its inclusion in a state-sponsored survey of contemporary Mexican art staged at Mexico City's Fine Arts Palace. From its inception, then, *Lengua (Tongue)* grates against status-quo functionalism in a multitude of contexts, calling attention to class inequality and related social perversions embodied at their point of origin in a grotesque cycle of commerce.

Property relations are another frequent target of the pieces in the book. Under the "land" subsection of "Goods," Jacob presents work by Edward Poitras, Hans Haacke, Maria Eichhorn, and Gordon Matta-Clark that takes ownership practices and turns them inside out. In particular, Haacke's infamous 1971 solo exhibit documenting the slum properties of a wealthy New York real estate corporation, "Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System as of May 1, 1971," which the director of the Guggenheim cancelled in a bid to "fend off an alien substance that had entered the art museum organism," is an instance of artistic commerce shattering an ideological illusion, namely the autonomy of a corporate-funded "organism" from exploitative relationships.<sup>3</sup> Colonial land seizure in Canada is the subject of Métis artist Edward Poitras's installation, "Offensive/Defensive" (1988), which exchanged two strips of grass, one from the groomed grounds of the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, the other from the prairie reserve lands of the George Gordon First Nation (Cree, Saulteaux) located southeast of the city.<sup>4</sup> The transaction exposed the tenuous contingency of legal structures imposed in the late

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nineteenth century by colonizing government officials to create relations of ownership that displaced and marginalized the region's original inhabitants. Poitras buried lead moulds spelling out "offensive"/"defensive" underneath each strip, signifying that the Métis/Indigenous tradition of resistance against such impositions is far from over.<sup>4</sup>

Global in scope, with work spanning the 1950s to the present, *Commerce by Artists* is an extraordinary achievement simply in terms of its conceptualization. But it is most compelling when documenting how artists have prefigured anarchic potentialities through exchanges that undermine capitalism and state power. ○

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Luis Jacob, "Introduction: Commerce by Artists," in *Commerce by Artists*, ed. Luis Jacob (Toronto: Art Metropole, 2011), 2.
- 2 Jorge di Paola, "Victor Grippo: Change Habits, Modify Consciousness," *Commerce by Artists*, 366.
- 3 Hans Haacke, "Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System as of May 1, 1971," *Commerce by Artists*, 292–293.
- 4 Joyce Whitebear Reed, "Offensive/Defensive," *Commerce by Artists*, 286–287.

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BIO Allan Antliff, Canada Research Chair at the University of Victoria, is author of *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (2001), *Anarchy and Art: From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (2007), and a forthcoming monograph on Joseph Beuys. He is also editor of *Only a Beginning: An Anarchist Anthology* (2004) and Director of the University of Victoria's Anarchist Archive. He is art editor with the UK-based journal *Anarchist Studies* and recently edited a special "Art and Anarchy" issue of the interdisciplinary journal, *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* (2011).