

WEIRD COMMERCE AT THE GHETTO BIENNALE (PROVERBS FROM THE GOSSIP WALL)

KOMÈS LA DWÒL NAN GËTO BYENAL LA (PWOVÈB AVÈK ZEN KI EKRI SOU TABLO A)

JOHN CUSSANS

*Ti machoun'n a yon dola ou fé sòs
With one dollar we can make a sauce*

The history of the Atis Rezistans community in Lakou Cheri might help to explain what, for me, is the most important work of the Ghetto Biennale: the production of artworks created cooperatively by visiting artists and their Haitian hosts, and the challenges encountered and overcome in doing so. Ever since the establishment of the Centre D'Art by the American Dewitt Peters in 1944, Haitian artists have largely depended on the patronage of international and local collectors, and the sales of work to international visitors. Although the patronage system and tourist market managed to survive the Duvalier era relatively intact, there was little scope for the development of the critical and progressive currents within Haitian art that characterised the international modernisms and neo-avant-gardes of the 50's, 60's and 70's elsewhere. Instead Haitian art continued to develop along the lines established by the artists of the 1940's and 50's, inspired by folk art, craft traditions and Vodou-Catholic iconology and ceremonial artefacts, often reflecting the expectations and tastes of international tourists. After the collapse of the Duvalier regime in the late 1980's, when tourism went into steep decline in Haiti, a number of artists from Lakou Cheri, who traditionally produced tourist art for the nearby Iron Market, began using their traditional wood-carving and metalwork skills to create the brutal, unsettling and often comedic large-scale sculptures of grim and lascivious Guede spirits - associated with the nearby cemetery - that have become representative of what we might call the Atis Rezistans School. [Fig. 6.2, Fig. 6.3] These sculptures, which combine wood, metal, bones, skulls, car parts and found objects from the local area, express, in a striking way, the extremity,

*Ti machoun'n a yon dola ou fé sòs
With one dollar we can make a sauce*

An 2010 twa pwofesè sikoloji nan Inivèsite British Columbia ekri yon atik pou jounal Behavioral and Brain Sciences ki rele "Moun ki pi dwòl nan monn nan?!" WEIRD ki vle di dwòl an anglè, se yon akwonim pou Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic ki an kreyòl se Oksidantal, Edike, Endistriyalize, Rich epi Demokratik. Yo te ililize akwonim sa pou dekri ki tip de sosyete ke moun reprezante kòm "nòmal" nan majorite etid sou konpòtman yo fè nan inivèsite (majorite Ameriken). Mwen itilize tèm sa an jeneral pou mwen pale de milye sosyal atis vizitè nan Geto Byenal an Ayiti yo. Baz pwopozisyon an se ke atis WEIRD la genyen ide ki byen defini sou sa yon pyès la vle di, de valè li ak fonksyon sosyal li. Ide sa yo soti nan lekòl boza WEIRD, edikasyon inivèsite epi inivè boza yo kotwaye WEIRD, men nou pa nesesèman retwouve ide sa yo nan moun ke domèn sa pa enfliyanse. Vizyon WEIRD la jeneralman li itopik, li ideyalis, pwogresif e sosyalman responsab, li konsidere ke la se yon bagay ki an opozisyon ou byen nan yon fason, ki ka konropi, pa pragmatik ou byen objektif komèsyal finansye. Menm jan Hans Abbing poze deba a nan Why are artists poor? (Poukisa atis yo pòv?) Kwayans sa yo plis baze sou yon mit epòk Romantik la ki di ke la se yon bagay ki sanse "sakre"². Mwen te kapab ajoute ke dominans teyori kritik Maksis nan lekòl avèk inivèsite WEIRD yo ranfòse sans sakre sa. Sa ki transfòme kwayans prèske teyolojik sou finalite sakre la a, an kwayans ki kritik, anti kapitalis epi ki emansipatè sosyalman.

*Tou nouvo, tou dous
Everything new is sweet*



Fig. 6.2 Sculpture by Atis Rezistans in Lakou Cheri, 2nd Ghetto Biennale 2011, Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Photo: John Cussans

Fig. 6.2 Eskilti yo pa Atis Rezistans nan Lakou Cheri, 2yèm Geto Byenal 2011, Pòtoprens, Ayiti. Foto: John Cussans



Fig. 6.3 Sculpture by Atis Rezistans in Lakou Cheri, 2nd Ghetto Biennale 2011, Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Photo: John Cussans

Fig. 6.3 Eskilti yo pa Atis Rezistans nan Lakou Cheri, 2yèm Geto Byenal 2011, Pòtoprens, Ayiti. Foto: John Cussans

rawness and material conditions in which they are made. The legacy of traditional tourist art production still survives in the Grand Rue and continues to be a largely unacknowledged dynamic underpinning the exchanges - economic, creative and personal - between the Lakou Cheri community and their guests.

Geto Byenal se yon aktivite entènasyonal ki fèt nan Pòtoprens, kapital peyi Ayiti. Se Leah Gordon, yon fotograf epi reyalizatè britanik, ansanm avèk yon kolektif atis Ayisyen, Atis Resistans, de atis ki ap viv epi travay nan zòn Lakou Cheri bò Granri ki mete li sou pye. Apre ane 80 yo, lè endistri touris la te degrengole, atis avèk atizan ki te konn pwodui atik pou touris nan Lakou Cheri bò mache an fè, deside sèvi avèk talan tradisyonèl yo nan travay sou bwa epi dekoupaj metal (fè) pou kreye de gwo eskilti ki brital epi chokan e menm defwa komik tou sou fanmi lwa Vodou Gede yo, lwa ki sonm makab epi libèten e ki gen rapò avèk simityè a ki tou pre a. Eskilti sa yo ki konbine bwa, fè, zo, tèt mò, pyès machin e lòt bagay ke yo rekipere nan zòn nan; mete aklè nan ki kondisyon materyèl yo fèt. Depi lè sa, kominote atis sa te komanse travay sou non Atis Rezistans (manm pi ansyen e granmoun yo) epi Timoun Resistans ki se pitit Atis yo. Eritaj pwodiksyon tradisyonèl pou touris yo nan Granri toujou rete e li kontinye fè pati yon dinamik ke yo pa rekonèt vreman men ki se baz ki kenbe byenal la. Byenal la sot selebre katriyèm reprezantasyon li antan ke yon aktivite ki a mwatye fwa atistik e a mwatye yon eksperimantasyon sosyal.

*Everything new is sweet
Tou nouvo, tou dous*

The Ghetto Biennale experience rarely leaves visitors unaffected. Upon leaving the airport in Port-au-Prince they will likely be struck by the marked poverty of the country compared to the one they departed. The reality of Haiti's material, economic and infrastructural poverty is made tangible on the chaotic and bumpy journey from airport to hotel. Grand Rue is itself a major commercial and transit artery for the city and, as such, is particularly choked with traffic, debris and exhaust fumes during the day. Its roads, mostly unlit at night, are filled with treacherous potholes and open drains that often spill over into the streets forming pools of effluent, oil and debris. The daily movement of goods and people along "the rue" means that there is always work to be done, wares to be sold and money to be made there. [Fig. 6.4] But the conditions in which people live in and around Lakou Cheri, with no access to continuous running water or electricity, no basic sanitation or plumbing, no public services to speak of, and one toilet for sixty people, make it a far more materially impoverished environment than anything a visitor is likely to have encountered in the poorest parts of Europe or the USA. [Fig. 6.5]

On the whole the local people of Grand Rue are Kréyol-speaking Haitians who live in conditions of global-grade poverty. Many, though not all, are Vodouisants/Catholic, some Protestant, and most would describe themselves as Black (as opposed to White/Blanc or Mulatto/Milat). The visiting artists are of various races, ethnicities, and religions (or not), speak English and other languages (but usually not Kréyol) and live in conditions of relative global affluence. Most of the visitors are educated to university-level, most of the locals are not. Most of the visitors are progressive, unequivocally humanitarian, socially, sexually and culturally liberal, egalitarian, democratic and of a generally Left-leaning political persuasion. Some of the locals share these values. Others may not. The visiting artists are mixed gender, the local artists mostly male. Obviously, there are many different attitudes and beliefs within the two groups and my characterization of them is very rudimentary. I certainly don't mean to suggest that there aren't common values, interests and affections between the two groups, or that cultural differences aren't quickly overcome during the event. But as any artist who has been involved realizes, no amount of artistic collaboration and goodwill between locals and visitors is going to change the fundamental disparity of wealth and opportunity between the two groups on a macro scale, and the general absence of a shared discourse about international contemporary art and its fashionable theoretical discourses.

*Yap pale nap travay
They're talking, we're working*

In 2010 three psychology professors at the University of British Columbia wrote a paper for the journal of Brain and Behavioral Studies entitled 'The Weirdest People



Fig. 6.4 People on Grand Rue by the entrance to Atis Rezistans, 2nd Ghetto Biennale 2011, Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Photo: Alex Louis

Fig. 6.4 Moun ki sou Gran Ri pa pòtay Atis Rezistans, 2yèm Geto Byenal 2011, Pòtoprens, Ayiti. Foto: Alex Louis

*Yap pale nap travay
They're talking, we're working*

Li ra pou moun ki vini vizite Geto Byenal la ale san ke eskperyans la pa touche yo. Lè yo rive nan ayewopò Pòtoprens la, mwen kwè ke mizè ke yo wè nan peyi a ka make yo pa rapò peyi yo sòti a. Ou gentan wè konsekans plis depandans peyi a sou ONG entènasyonal yo (espesyalman depi tranbleman de tè 2010 la epi epidemi kolera ki te komanse apre li a) e ti rantrè dola ameriken ke yon ti gwoup touris pote a, li vizib lè ou wè jan chofè taksi yo ap fè konpetisyon pou yo jwenn pasajè. Reyajite tanjib povrete ekonomik e striktirèl Ayiti a vizib sou wout pou soti ayewopò a pou rive nan otèl la. Se ke kenpòt jan ou mete figi ou lè ou fè fas a povrete sa, ke ou rezistan ke kè ou sansib, li afekte ou. Granri se yonn nan atè komèsyal prensipal nan vil la kidonk li chaje sikilasyon, fatra epi lafimen moflè pandan jounen an. Lannuit, pi fò wout yo pa genyen limyè, yo chaje twou ke w pa toujou wè, genyen bouch egou ki pa kouvri ki ap koule nan lari a, yo fè ma dlo sal ki chita e ki melanje ak lwil. Machandiz avèk moun toujou kreye mouvman nan lari a, sa vle di toujou genyen travay pou fè, machandiz pou vann e lajan pou brase. Men nan kondisyon moun yo ap viv nan Lakou Cheri e nan zanzviron yo, kote dlo pa vini nan tiyo tout tan, ni pa genyen kouran tout tan, kote manke asenisman avèk plonbri elemantè yo, kote sanse pa genyen sèvis piblik e kote yon twalèt ap sèvi pou 60 moun, sa vle di ke anvivònman sa genyen plis mizè materyèl pase nenpòt kote ke nou di ki pi pòv nan Wayòm Ini.

An jeneral, moun nan Granri se de Ayisyen ki pale Kreyòl ki ap viv nan yon sitiyasyon povrete ki genyen mondyal. Anpil nan yo, menm si se pa tout, Vodouyizan/Katolik, kèk nan yo Pwotestan, e pi fò nan yo di ke se Nwa yo ye, kidonk yo pa ni Blan, ni Milat Ayisyen. Atis vizitè soti nan plizyè ras, etnisite, relijyon, (ou byen yo pa genyen relijyon). Yo pale Anglè ou byen lòt lang tou (men souvan yo pa pale Kreyòl) e fason yo viv relativman rich globalman. Pi fò nan



Fig. 6.5 Rooftops near Lakou Cheri, 4th Ghetto Biennale 2015, Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Photo: John Cussans

Fig. 6.5 Moun ki sou Gran Ri pa pòtay Atis Rezistans, 2yèm Geto Byenal 2011, Pòtoprens, Ayiti. Foto: John Cussans

in the World?’¹. WEIRD, an acronym for Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic, was used to describe the kinds of society that people taken as representative of “normality” in most human behavioral studies conducted at (mainly North American) universities come from. I’m using it here to designate, in the most general terms, the social background of the visiting artists to the Ghetto Biennale. The basic proposition is that WEIRD artists tend to have very specific ideas about art’s meaning, value and social function, received from their WEIRD art schools, university educations and participation in WEIRD artworlds, that are not necessarily shared by people who live outside that realm. The WEIRD outlook is generally a utopian, idealistic, progressive and socially responsible one, which often sees art as antagonistic to, or somehow corrupted by, commercial, monetary or purely pragmatic aims. As Hans Abbing argues in *Why Are Artists Poor?*, such beliefs are based largely on the thinly-veiled Romantic myth that art is somehow Holy, avant-gardist assumptions that it should be somehow critical of social inequity and injustice, and the broadly Marxist moralism that it should not be tainted by Capitalist interests or motives².

Making work with members of the Lakou Cheri community is a fundamental part of the Ghetto Biennale experience. Without the support and goodwill of local people it is hard to imagine any work getting made at all. For many of the visiting artists such experiences constitute the principle reward for participating in the event. For locals, collaboration with visiting artists can be a life-changing experience too, and the relationships

vizitè sa yo genyen diplòm inivèsite, pi fò nan moun nan zòn nan pa rive nan inivèsite. Pi fò nan vizitè yo pwogresif, yo pa cache ke yo imanité, yo se de liberal nan milye sosyal, kiltirèl, e seksyèl, se moun ki kwè nan egalite tout moun, yo demokrat e jeneralman yo plis genyen afinite avèk ide de goch nan zafè politik. Anpil nan moun nan lokal yo kwè nan menm valè sa yo. Genyen lòt ki pa kwè nan yo. Atis vizitè yo se fi tankou gason, atis lokal yo pi fò se gason. Li evidan ke pami toulede gwoup yo genyen plizyè atitud diferan e kwayans diferan e jan mwen dekri karaktè yo a se yon deskripsyon byen sipèfisyèl. Sa pa vle di ke pa genyen de valè, enterè e de afesyon ke yo pataje ansanm, ou byen ke diferans kiltirèl ki ka prezante pandan aktivite a, yo pa depase yo byen vit. Men atis ki enplike yo ka wè ke pa genyen ankenn kolaborasyon atistik ou byen bònfwà ant atis lokal yo avèk vizitè yo, ki pral chanje disparite fondamantal ki genyen nan richès avèk opòtinite sou gran echèl.

Gren yon ti moun ki di yon blan li grangou epi blan an di li tann li pral dèyè manje. Lè li tounen li tounen ak yon grenn Marinad... (lol!!!!)

A little child says to a white person ‘I’m hungry.’ The white person says ‘Wait for me, I’m going to get you some food.’ The man comes back with one little patty... (lol!!!)

Lè vizitè yo travay avèk manm nan kominote Lakou cheri a, jeneralman, se yon eksperyans ki touche yo pwofondeman. Eksperyans sa, kote pa vreman genyen echanj lajan, se yonn nan pi gwo rekonpans

1. Henrich, Joseph, Heine, Steven J. and Norenzayan, Ara ‘The Weirdest People in the World?’ Behavioral and Brain Sciences Volume 33 / Issue 2-3 / June 2010, pp 61- 83 Cambridge University Press 2010 (<http://www2.psych.ubc.ca/~henrich/pdfs/WeirdPeople.pdf>). 1. Joseph Henrich, Steven J. Heine avèk Ara Norenzayan, ‘The weirdest people in the world?’ Behavioral and Brain Sciences “Moun ki pi dwòl nan lemon? “Syans sou Sèvo avèk Konpòtman”. Liv 33, Piblikasyon 2-3, pp 61- 83, Jwen 2010, Cambridge University Press, 2010 (<http://www2.psych.ubc.ca/~henrich/pdfs/WeirdPeople.pdf>) 2. Hans Abbing *Why are Artists Poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts* (2002) University of Amsterdam Press 2. Hans Abbing *Why are Artists Poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts*, (Pouki sa atis pòv? Ka patikilye sou Ekonomi pou la) University of Amsterdam Press, 2002

they form often continue well after the biennale. But while the principle benefits for visitors are largely experiential, for the locals the direct financial rewards for participation are much more important. Some of the complexity, frustration and difficulties experienced by visitors to the biennale involve negotiating this asymmetry, and the exchanges (monetary, artistic or otherwise) that take place must confront and overcome clear linguistic, economic and cultural barriers. It is largely in the overcoming of these differences that the most valuable learning experiences are had, the most unexpected, rewarding and inspiring works are made, and lasting relationships forged.

Çen yon ti moun ki di yon blan li grangou epi blan an di li tann li pral dèyè manje. Lè li tounen li tounen ak yon grenn Marinad... (lol!!!!)

A little child says to a white person "I'm hungry". The white person says "wait for me, I'm going to get you some food". The man comes back with one little patee... (lol!!!!)

Since the second Ghetto Biennale of 2011, which was significantly shaped by the consequences of the 2010 earthquake, I have personally taken a reflective and gently critical view of the inter-cultural peculiarities of the event, and particularly the inter-personal dynamics operating between the visiting artists, the event's organizers and members of the local community. It was in this spirit that I proposed to make a "gossip wall" at the 4th Ghetto Biennale in 2015.

One of the three curatorial themes of GBIV was 'Kréyol', the native language of Haiti, spoken by the majority of the population, and particularly the poor and less educated. In order to find out what local residents in Lakou Cheri thought about the biennale, I hung a large piece of blackboard-painted canvas in the main yard, left a pot of chalks beside it, and invited people to write their zen (Kréyol for gossip) about the event onto it. [Fig. 6.6, Fig. 6.7] The zen was documented after each day and the blackboard sponged clean for the following. The first piece of gossip came from local artist Mabelle Williams, one of the few female Haitian artists involved in the event:

Fok ou ta la pou'w ta wè 3 blan ki al nan mache jis Petyonvil sak pi bel la ki saw panse yo al achte? Yo al achte plim poul

You had to be there to see three white people going all the way to the market in Pétionville just to buy chicken feathers.

The brunt of this gossip was a group of blancs (wealthy international visitors, whether black or white) so unfamiliar with the markets of Haiti that they would rather travel several miles to procure materials for artworks that they could have bought just around the corner (i.e. in Grand Rue). What makes the joke funnier for locals is that Pétionville is one of the wealthiest parts of Port-au-Prince, home to Haiti's most affluent residents and the location of its more established and respectable

pou moun ki patisipe nan aktivite a. Pou moun lokal yo, kolaborasyon avèk atis yo ki vini vizite yo a, konn tounen yon eksperyans ki transfòmasyon yo e relasyon ke yo kreye yo rete jis aprè byenal la. Men kote ke se eksperyans la ki benefis prensipal pou vizitè yo, pou atis lokal yo, lajan ke yo fè pou patisipasyon yo a, enpòtan anpil. Yonn nan bagay ki pi konplèks e ki lakòz fristrasyon ak difikilte nan eksperyans vizitè byenal yo se fason yo ap eseye negosye inegalite ki genyen epi echanj (lajan, atistik ou byen lòt domèn) yo fè pou yo kapab depase baryè langaj, ekonomik e kiltirèl sa yo. Se sitou lè yo depase diferans sa yo ke pi bèl eksperyans aprantisay yo rive fèt, ke zèw ki pote plis enspirasyon, satisfaksyon san atann yo rive fèt e ke relasyon ki dirab rive kreye. Yonn nan twa tèm ke Geto Byenal 2015 lan te prezante se "Kreyòl" lang matènèl Ayisyen, ke majorite popilasyon an pale, espesyalman sa ki pi pòv e ki pa genyen edikasyon fòmèl yo. Pou mwen te rive konnen ki sa moun ki ap viv nan Lakou Cheri panse de byenal la, mwen te mete yon gwo tablo nan lakou prensipal la avèk yon po lakrè akote li e mwen te mande moun yo ekri zen pa yo sou aktivite a. [Fig. 6.6] [Fig 6.7] Chak lè jounen an pral fini, yo te ekri zen yo epi nan demen yo efase tablo a. Premye zen ke yo te mete, se atis Mabelle Williams, yonn nan ra atis fanm ki te enplike nan aktivite a:

Fòk ou ta la pou'w ta wè 3 blan ki al nan mache jis Petyonvil sak pi bel la ki saw panse yo al achte? Yo al achte plim poul

You had to be there to see three white people going all the way to the market in Pétionville just to buy chicken feathers.

Zen sa se de yon gwoup blan (yo rele etranje ki soti lòt kote blan kit ou blan ou kit ou nwa) ki tèlman pa abitye avèk mache an Ayiti ke yo pito rale plizyè kilomèt pou yo achte materyèl pou zèw atistik yo an alòske yo ke yo te kapab achte yo nan bout kwen Granri a. Sa ki fè blag la pi komik pou moun nan zòn nan se ke Petyonvil se yonn nan kote ki pi rich nan Pòtoprens, kote Ayisyen ki genyen plis mwayen rete e se la ke galri da ki pi rekoni e ki pi respektab yo ye. Istwa sa revele yon bagay enpòtan sou ekonomi reyèl Geto Byenal la. Apa atansyon li atire sou travay Atis ak Timoun Rezistans yo fè e atire atansyon sou de kesyon enpòtan sou wòl la kontanporen nan yon ekonomi kiltirèl global ki dezekilibre anpil, yonn nan fonksyon ekonomik prensipal aktivite a, se fè lajan rantre nan Lakou Cheri sou fòm dola ke touris pote. Donk chak dola ke yon moun depanse yon lòt kote se yon dola ke kominote a pèdi.

Pou atis envite yo kapab kreye travay yo dwe kreye de relasyon ki ap mache byen avèk moun nan kominote lokal la. Donk apa pri otèl avèk vwayaj la, pi fò lajan ke vizitè yo depanse pandan aktivite sa a, se pou peye machandiz ke yo achte epi sèvis ke moun ki enplike dirèkteman ou byen endirèkteman nan kominote Lakou Cheri a ap ofri. Fristrasyon ke tout vizitè yo genyen se kantite lajan ke yo rive depanse nan peyi a. Sa

art galleries. The anecdote reveals an important fact about the concrete economics of the Ghetto Biennale. Beyond bringing attention to the work of Atis and Ti Moun Rezistans, and raising important questions about the role of contemporary art in a severely imbalanced global-cultural economy, one of the event's practical economic functions is to bring revenue, in the form of tourist dollars, into Lakou Cheri. So every dollar spent elsewhere is a dollar lost to the community. Beyond hotel costs and flights, most of the visitors' expenditure during the event involves buying goods and services from people who are directly or indirectly involved with the Lakou Cheri community. A common frustration expressed by visitors is how much money they end up spending there. This may come as a surprise for a country commonly identified as the poorest in the Western hemisphere, but it is not uncommon in places where tourism generally operates above and beyond the wider society. It also has to do, in part, with navigating the steep currency gradient between US dollars and Haitian gourdes. Break a \$10 bill and you'll get approximately 600 gourdes. In order to simplify the unstable relationship between the two currencies, Haitians use a virtual currency called the Haitian dollar: 1 Haitian dollar = 5 gourdes, a permanently fixed rate. So \$10 US = 600 Gourde = \$120 Haitian. This translation between US dollars, Haitian dollars and gourdes can make negotiating prices in Haiti, which are usually informal, a confounding affair that takes time to master. And once your dollars are broken they soon dissipate into the wider economy. Sometimes it just seems simpler, at least for those with sufficient disposable wealth to do so, and a poor head for currency conversion, to hand over a \$10 or \$20 bill and wait for a response: enough or not? Your change will usually be handed back to you in a handful of gourdes.

The most characteristic economic difference between visitors and locals at the Ghetto Biennale is that money generally flows from the former to the latter, while the trade in artworks generally flows in the opposite direction. Their relative affluence and transient presence in Haiti puts visitors in the position of potential buyers of Haitian art, a category that most WEIRD artists are generally unaccustomed to. A WEIRD artist might well visit a friend's studio to discuss their work, and point out a particular work that is exceptionally good. Their friend may thank them. But they would probably not ask how much they would give for it, or be disappointed if they didn't want to buy it. At the GB however, a visit to a local artist's studio is often taken as an opportunity for the artist to sell work. This can be a disconcerting and confusing experience for WEIRD artists, who generally don't regard art as something they want to own. So while the visiting artists are making participatory, socially-engaged, ephemeral and non-commercial artworks, their Haitian colleagues are making sculptures, paintings and other artisanal goods that they expect the visitors to buy from them at good prices. In other words, WEIRD artists often find themselves in the position of patrons in Haiti, a potentially disconcerting

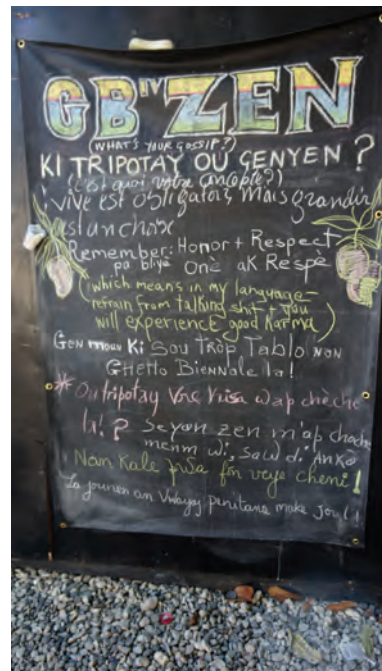


Fig. 6.6 Gossip wall in Lakou Cheri at the 4th Ghetto Biennale 2015, Port-au-Prince, Haiti
Photo: John Cussans

Fig. 6.6 Mi tripotay nan Lakou Cheri nan 4yèm Geto Byenal 2015, Pòtoprens, Ayiti
Foto: John Cussans



Fig. 6.7 Gossip wall in Lakou Cheri at the 4th Ghetto Biennale 2015, Port-au-Prince, Haiti
Photo: John Cussans

Fig. 6.7 Mi tripotay nan Lakou Cheri nan 4yèm Geto Byenal 2015, Pòtoprens, Ayiti
Foto: John Cussans

kapab etone anpil moun paske se yon peyi ke yo abitye konsidere tankou peyi “ki pi pòv nan emisfè lwès la”, men sa rive souvan ke kote touris yo ap fonksyone nan yon klas apa de sosyete a. E se paske tou, pant pou ou monte pou ou konpran relasyon ant lajan lokal la avèk dola ameriken an rèd. Si ou chanje 10 dola, li ap ba ou 600 goud apèprè. Pou kapab senplifye to a ki pa stab ant de lajan sa yo, Ayisyen yo itilize yon lòt lajan vityèl ke yo rele dola Ayisyen. 1 dola Ayisyen = 5 goud e to sa pa janm chanje. Donk 10 dola Ameriken = 600 = 120 dola Ayisyen. Echanj ant dola ameriken, dola ayisyen e goud la vin rann machandaj an Ayiti, ki souvan se yon bagay enfòmèl, pa fasil pou konprann e li pran tan pou w metrize li. Lè yo chanje

experience for those who usually hope to be the beneficiaries rather than the benefactors of “funding for the arts”.

This troubling situation is aggravated by the fact that most of the visitors are relatively poor in their home countries. Many are young, recently graduated, self-funding and without institutional support. It's not uncommon to hear them explaining to their Haitian colleagues that, back home, they are poor too. And it's true. Artists in developed countries like the UK are generally poor relative to other professionals. To make things worse - and in some ways to amplify a WEIRD artist's potential identification with the poverty of their Haitian colleagues - the UK art world has a Gini coefficient (the statistical measure of economic inequality) as high as that of Haiti. There is therefore a similar disparity of wealth between the richest UK artists and the majority of their low-earning artistic colleagues as that between the wealthy elites of Pétionville and their compatriots in Grand Rue. But of course, relative to most of the artists in Lakou Cheri, who, as urban Haitians can expect to earn on average \$400 per annum, the visitors are still very wealthy, despite their relative poverty compared to “blue chip” artists in the WEIRD world.

It can come as something of a culture shock to these WEIRD, poor and idealistic visiting artists, that they are in fact remarkably rich, not only in financial terms, but also in terms of the social, economic and professional opportunities they have as artists in the WEIRD world, where universal primary and secondary education, universal health care, fully-functioning state apparatuses, public services and state-subsidized arts funding are taken for granted. The consequence of this inescapable asymmetry is that visiting artists are repeatedly confronted with the reality of their fiscal, social and material security relative to their hosts. It is something that can generate a high degree of cognitive dissonance for WEIRD artists, who don't ordinarily see themselves as a privileged global class. The experience of finding oneself far richer than one's hosts while trying to maintain a belief in art's sacred, emancipatory, non-commercial and socially progressive function, can be a profoundly confusing and potentially transformative one.

*Se annepye ki pou ba wou enpotans twal kay
A centipede can teach you the importance of an old rag.*

As we have seen, for visitors, the rewards for participation in the Ghetto Biennale are largely immaterial: new knowledge, learning and experiences; a significant addition to one's artistic CV; and a measure of cultural capital that can increase their chances of securing exhibitions and future funding (as long as the Ghetto Biennale retains its credibility in the WEIRD artworld). What the locals get is revenue from the sales of their work; a large infusion of US dollars into the local economy during the few weeks of the event; the opportunity to meet and work with international artists and to learn from them; to develop friendships and social

dola ou ba yo a, yo fonn byen vit nan ekonomi global lan. Defwa li parèt pi senp, di mwens pou moun ki genyen lajan ase e ki pa twò fò nan zafè fè kalkil pou chanje lajan an, pou peye avèk yon biyè 10 dola ou byen 20 dola epi mande si li ase? Sa rive souvan ke yo remèt ou yon lyas goud pou monnen.

Diferans ekonomik ki make eksperyans vizitè avèk atis lokal yo pi plis nan Geto Byenal la, se ke lajan pase nan men vizitè yo pou ale jwenn moun lokal yo, tandiske jeneralman echanj nan domèn la se nan lòt sans la li konn fèt. Paske yo relativman genyen mwayen e kòm vizitè yo kout an Ayiti sa vin mete vizitè yo nan pozisyon ke yo tounen de achtè potansyèl pou la Ayisyen, yon kategori ke laplipa atis ki nan kategori WEIRD la pa abitye ladan l. Atis ke nou konsidere tankou WEIRD yo ka pase nan estidyo yon zanmi, diskite de travay li, di l yonn nan zèv li yo patikilyèman bon. Zanmi a ap remèsye yo men mwens pa kwè ke yo pa t ap mande yo ki pri li, ou byen pou yo ta desi si yo pa ta vle achte li. Poutan nan Geto Byenal la, depi ou rantre nan estidyo yon atis lokal, yo deja pran sa tankou yon opòtinite pou yo vann. Se yon eksperyans ki twouble atis WEIRD yo paske jeneralman, yo pa gade la tankou yon bagay ke yo ta renmen posede oubyen ke yo gen mwayen pou achte, yo pa konsidere tèt yo tankou de mesèn ou byen de koleksyonè. Pandan ke atis vizitè yo ap kreye de zèv atistik patisipatif, ki angaje sosyalman, ki pa dire epi ki pa komèsyal, kolèg ayisyen yo ap fè eskilti, penti epi atizana pou vizitè yo ka achte a bon pri.

*Se annepye ki pou ba wou enpotans twal kay
A centipede can teach you the importance of an old rag.*

Yon lòt rezon ki fè vizitè yo pa prevwa depans nan byenal la, se ke nan peyi yo, pi fò nan atis sa yo sanse pòv. Anpil nan yo se jèn moun ki fenk gradye, se yo menm ki mete lajan pou fè pwòjè pa yo e pa genyen enstitisyon ki ap ba yo sipò. Sa rive souvan ke ou tande yo ap eksplike kolèg ayisyen yo ke nan peyi yo, yo menm tou yo pòv. Nou ka di ke atis nan peyi devlope tankou Wayom Ini pi pòv parapò a moun nan lòt pwofesyon. Statistik resan montre ke an mwayèn atis nan Wayom Ini, avèk travay atistik yo sèlman, fè mwayen nan salè medyan an ki se £20,000. Sa ki mete yo tou pre salè minimum nan, e chif sa yo desann anpil lè yo depase laj 45-50 an. Sa ki pi mal la — e nan ka sa li fè atis WEIRD yo ta kapab idantifye tèt yo a sa atis ayisyen ki pòv ap pase — se ke nan monn atistik Wayom Ini a gen yo kowefisyan Gini, ki se mezi statistik inegalite ekonomik la, ki wo tankou pa Ayiti a. Menm inegalite ki ekziste ant atis ki pi rich nan Wayom Ini a, epi majorite kolèg yo ki pa fè anpil lajan an, se li menm ki ekziste ant elit ki genyen lajan nan Petyonvil avèk konpatriyòt yo ki an Granri a. Men byen si lè ou konpare atis Lakou cheri ki, antan ke Ayisyen ki ap viv lavil, kapab fè 400\$ pa ane, ou ka konsidere vizitè yo vreman antan ke rich, malgre ke yo sanse pòv parapò lòt atis WEIRD “blue chip” yo, “blue chip” ki vle di ki fè anpil lajan.

networks with artists outside of Haiti; and to get greater international visibility for their work.

What is therefore shared between visitors and locals in the Ghetto Biennale is a learning experience brought about by meeting and working with people with different artistic outlooks, traditions and expectations; artistic credibility within a global arts context; the creation of new works for exhibition; opportunities for future collaborations and artistic partnerships; and the creation of new social networks. What differs are the long term economic benefits of participation, which for the visitors will accrue immaterially over time and for the locals is expressed in concrete economic terms for the few weeks of the GB (after which it will largely dry up). Cultural capital accrued by locals through participation in the GB will occasionally transform into opportunities for funding, group shows, new artistic initiatives, or access to higher level art education in Haiti or abroad. But this is unusual, given the relative lack of art institutions in Haiti and arts organizations, and the inequality of access to them for poorer Haitians with neither French nor English as a second language.

Sigen paròl pyej gen repons dyan'm
Difficult questions need a firm answer

The Ghetto Biennale was founded to question and test the unacknowledged disparities of wealth and opportunity in an age of global art and international biennales, something it continues to do. But it can do nothing to change the asymmetry of means, income and opportunity between the international visitors and the local community of Lakou Cheri. And nor would it claim to. What it always aimed to do, and has to some extent achieved, is to bring awareness of this disparity to a wider international art audience, an awareness that only truly comes with the actual experience of making art in the lakou. And this experience is the unique selling point of the Ghetto Biennale for its international participants.

Since its inception the organizers of the Ghetto Biennale have worked hard to prevent it becoming a formal institution. But with each iteration the curating team has inevitably grown in experience and confidence, and since 2009 the number of participating artists has tripled. Despite this the GB has lost none of its rawness and intensity, and the experience for most participants is ultimately a rewarding and profoundly transformative one. But it can also be a deeply troubling one, especially for guests who find themselves a long way from the security and goodwill of the event's organisers and Lakou Cheri community, confronted by the disquieting realities of a country much poorer than their own. For visitors to the Ghetto Biennale the existential rewards have much to do with the shock of encountering a world of creativity flourishing in conditions that most WEIRD people would find intolerable in their home countries. Such rewards are earned from the overcoming of the personal, material and psychological obstacles they encounter trying to make work in the rue, and their dependency on the good

Sa ki koze yon chòk kiltirèl pou atis WEIRD sa yo ki pòv epi ki ideyalis, se ke yo vinn wè ke finalman yo rich, se pa sèlman sou pwofesyonèl, men tou nan zafè sosyal, ekonomik e opòtinite pwofesyonèl ke yo jwenn atan atis nan monn WEIRD la, kote edikasyon primè avèk segondè yo inivèsèl, swen sante inivèsèl, aparèy leta yo ap fonksyone byen, sèvis piblik yo epi fon pou la ke leta sibvansyone, tout sa yo konsidere tankou yon bagay ki nòmal. Inegalite sa ke yo pa kapab evite a vin fè ke atis vizitè yo oblije konfwonte reyalyite sekirite fiskal, sosyal epi materyèl yo parapò a moun yo k ap resevwa yo a plizyè fwa. Se yon bagay ki kapab jenere yon gwo degre disonans koyitif pou atis WEIRD yo, ki pa abitye wè tèt yo tankou moun ki fè pati klas privejye mondyal la. Lè yon eksperyans fè ou dekouvri ke ou pi rich pase moun ki envite w lan tandiske nan lespri ou, w ap eseye kenbe kwayans ou ke la se yon bagay ki sakre, emansipatwa, ki pa komèsyal e ki genyen yon fonksyon pou transfòmè sosyete a, se yon bagay ki ka konfonn ou e potansyèlman tranfòmè lavi w.

Lè nou gade, pou vizitè yo, satisfaksyon yo jwenn pou patisipasyon yo nan Geto Byenal la imateryèl pou pi fò: se plis konesans, aprantisav avèk eksperyans; yon ajou enpòtan nan CV atistik yo e yon kapital kiltirèl ki kapab ogmante chans yo pou yo kapab jwenn fon avèk posibilibite pou fè ekspozisyon (toutotan ke Geto Byenal la kenbe kredibilite li genyen nan monn WEIRD la). Ki sa atis lokal yo jwenn, se lajan ke yo fè nan vant zèv yo fè, yon gwo rantre dola ameriken nan ekonomi lokal la pandan kèk semenn kote aktivite yo a ap fèt la, opòtinite pou yo rankontre, travay avèk atis entènasyonal epi aprann de yo; fè zanmi epi kreye lyen nan rezo sosyal avèk atis lòt peyi ke Ayiti; rive jwenn plis vizibilite pou travay yo.

Sigen paròl pyej gen repons dyan'm
Difficult questions need a firm answer

Yon bagay ke atis vizitè yo ak atis lokal yo jwenn nan Geto Byenal la, se yon eksperyans kote yo aprann de rankont epi travay avèk moun ki genyen vizyon atistik diferan; lòt tradisyon avèk atant diferan; kredibilite atistik nan konteks mondyal la; kreyasyon nouvo travay pou ekzibisyon; opòtinite pou fè lòt kolaborasyon avèk patenarya atistik; epi kreyasyon nouvo rezo sosyal. Diferans ki genyen se benefis ekonomik ki dire lontan ke patisipasyon an pote, pou vizitè yo sa pral ogmante plis tan ap pase e pou atis lokal yo se de avantaj ekonomik konkrè pandan semèn yo ke GB ap fèt la (apre sa pi fò pral sispann). Kapital kiltirèl ke atis lokal yo jwenn nan vin grandi lè yo patisipe nan GB e sa kapab transfòmè a aksè a lajan pou pwojè yo, ekspozisyon an gwoup, nouvo inisyativ atistik, yon pi gwo nivo edikasyon nan la swa an Ayiti ou byen vwayaj a letranje. Men sa pa rive fasil etandone ke pa genyen anpil òganizasyon pou la an Ayiti, e genyen plis obstak pou ayisyen ki pi pòv yo e ki pa pale Franse oubyen Anglè tou yo.

will and cooperation of their hosts.

While visiting artists may gain in experience and knowledge through this, local artists benefit most from the potential for future collaboration. Although it can do nothing materially to change the fact of extreme wealth inequalities in the global artworld, the Ghetto Biennale can work to facilitate a culture of mutual aid by which the experiences, expertise and learning of artists from the WEIRD can be combined with the creativity, initiative and experience of their Haitian hosts. What local artists need most from the Ghetto Biennale are creative projects and partnerships facilitated by their international guests (and associated funding institutions) that can extend the spirit of cross-cultural cooperation and mutualism beyond Haiti and the lakou and into WEIRD worlds. The challenge for visitors who want to maintain their WEIRD ideals about the socially transformative and emancipatory powers of contemporary art is to create works that have this capacity in the longer term. Without this their participation in the Ghetto Biennale is merely a form of artistic poverty tourism, the existential rewards of which gain them cultural capital in the WEIRD artworld, but do nothing to affect the scales of inequality that the Ghetto Biennale exposed them to.

Pagen pryé ki pa gen amen
Every prayer has an amen

An earlier version of this text was published in The Happy Hypocrite '#ACCUMULATOR_PLUS', issue 9 (edited by Hannah Sawtell) in June 2016. The Kreyol translation in this catalogue was from the earlier published text.

Sa atis lokal yo avèk kominote a bezwen, se de rantrè lajan stab epi lòt opòtinite tankou Geto Byenal la, gras a tout pwojè kreyatif e tout patenarya li kapab ofri. Defi a pou vizitè yo ki vle kenbe ideyal WEIRD yo nan zafè pouvwa transfòmasyonèl, sosyal ou byen pou emansipasyon ke la kontanporen genyen, se pou yo kapab kreye de travay ki kapab fè fas a konfwontasyon avèk sa ki pa inivèsèl. Si sa pa fèt, pou atis WEIRD yo, patisipasyon yo nan Geto Byenal la ap sanble touris atistik sou do pòv, yon eskperyans ki ka pèmèt yo kapitalize nan monn WEIRD la pou fè konpetisyon pou rekonesans, vizibilite avèk estati.

Pagen pryé ki pa gen amen
Every prayer has an amen

Yon lòt vèsyon pi bonè nan tèks sa a te pibliye nan The Happy Hypocrite '#ACCUMULATOR_PLUS', volim 9 (modifye pa Hannah Sawtell) nan mwa Jen 2016. Kreyòl tradiksyon an nan katalòg sa a te soti nan tèks la kit e pibliye pi bonè.