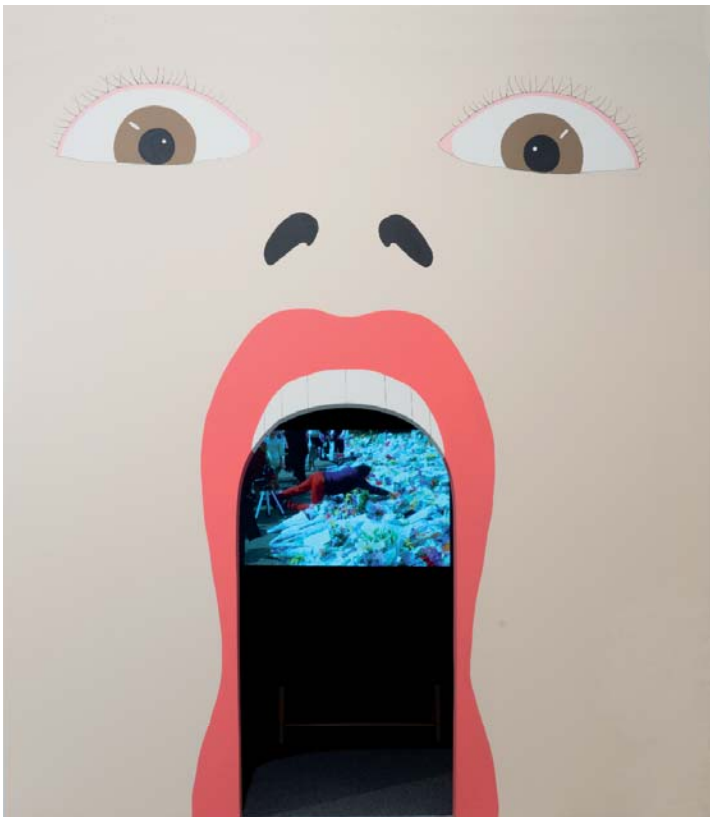


# JEREMY DELLER. THE INFINITELY VARIABLE IDEAL OF THE POPULAR

13 FEB — 07 JUN 2015



View of the instalation *Beyond the White Walls* at Contemporary Art Museum, St Louis, U.S.A., 2013

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simultaneously, for the complexity and for the ductility with which Deller approaches signs, lifestyles, images, and objects. He has managed to dodge the ghosts, the contradictions, the images of contemporary Great Britain, inhabited by the long shadow of the history of British industrialization and de-industrialization.

If the work of Jeremy Deller is naturally posited as a multiform process of research, it is because he belongs to the prodigious mesh of observers, critics and thinkers of industrial society. That a decisive part of the stories and images explored by Deller have a point of convergence in popular music is part of the plan. As the artist himself has noted, in reference to Judas Priest, "Music, like industry, is in the blood - literally." Deller sees popular music, and all kinds of popular pleasures, transgressions and deviations, as a stratified register of the subjective revolutions of industrial modernity, which culminate in the depression of the neo-liberal triumph that alludes to the Post-Industrial pathos, so full of nostalgia for coal soot, symbolized in the black wall of the mural *I ♥ Melancholy* (1993-1994). Deller has an especially subtle perception in detecting the expressions of industrial sensibility and how popular culture, both that of this order and the spontaneous one, depends, to a great extent, on the dichotomies of the history of what a multitude of authors has already termed the "Anthropocene", in order to highlight how the technical civilization, based on fossil fuel energy, has transformed not only society, but also existence on the Earth in all its dimensions.

Rather than an attachment to a series of artistic proceedings, it is this sensibility that defines his work as a constant socio-affective intervention. This sensibility allows him to locate the historical trauma in English society around the defeat of the Miners' Strike in 1984. He represents the strike with the field battle between the riot police and the miners in Orgreave. Deller reconstructed it as great reenactment event in 2001, in *The Battle of Orgreave*, and presented it as that form of contemporary heroism which, mostly, consists in an evasion and a strategic hijacking of the identity of the working class.

Jeremy Deller (London, 1966), is an artist concerned with the paradoxes of popular culture, specifically with British culture in the context of a Post-Industrial society. These paradoxes are not only something that exists in vernacular manifestations, in folklore, or in the spectacle, but is something that can be provided through art. Art is capable of producing scenarios, life experiences, collective moments, where the paradoxes, the recesses, the cracks are not resolved, but become productive. Starting in the decade of the 1990s, he has generated a series of practices and events, in which different social desires and tensions, as well as different existing representations of identity, history, and community operate.

Jeremy Deller has developed his work into a unique form of public art, or, as Dawn Ades would say, he is more interested in public life in Great Britain than in public art. He departs from those art practices that look for instances of community inside the white walls of the museum. In their place, he has adopted public space, in a wide sense, as the place where to inquire how the signs and symbols of the popular, the relationships between high and low culture, are configured, and about how mass culture and middle-class culture circulate, about the flow of pop culture and music, as a vehicle for infinite social energies. Partying, boredom, non-action, othering and social difference appear as means for art production.

The exhibition *The Infinitely Variable Ideal Of The Popular* strives to trace the three key elements in his work: his way of adopting a distance, through art gestures and actions, from the traditional art circuit and the museum, at an early stage in his career; how he generates collective moments through the creation of situations of social interactions, where the popular takes place as fiction and as reality; and, finally, how the artist adopts a position regarding History, through following characters who embody change or historical signs, or, also, through the construction of *reenactments*, where life and History happen one more time. Rather than establishing a linear narrative of his career, the exhibition attempts to connect modes of operation and intervention in the social structure, media and subject matter with the goal to account,

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Both in his early works, such as the campaign with the claim *Brian Epstein Died for You* from 1994, that attributed to the manager of The Beatles a revolutionary cultural role, parallel to Andy Warhol's invention of Pop, as in the way in which he explored Late Capitalist witchcraft - taking up as a starting point the recycling of the Range Rover S.U.V., in *English Magic* (2013), in the United Kingdom Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of 2013 - Jeremy Deller elaborates a complex picture, which always goes beyond the mere description of a commodity civilization.



*The Battle of Orgreave*, 2001.  
Photo: Parisah Taghizadeh



Jeremy Deller is particularly skillful in not getting distracted by the fetishism of our civilization, and in emphasizing the amalgamation of illusion, eroticism, and self-deception produced by our subjectivity. Thus, also, the ability and grace with which he deconstructs the apparent eccentricity in order to reveal the historical density, be that by engaging the prodigious creativity of an artistic druid, such as Bruce Lacey, in *The Bruce Lacey Experience*, in 2012, or by activating the multi-faceted aesthetic creativity of the wrestler Adrian Street, premised on the need to create the most provocative and distant imaginary possible in the face of the proletarian masculinity of his father, a coal miner (So *Many Ways To Hurt You. The Life And Times of Adrian Street*, 2010).



Adrian Street with his father at the pithead of Brynmawr Colliery, Wales, 1973. Photo: Dennis Hutchinson

Their passion and capacity to be contagious come from the act of constituting themselves, at any given moment, as a research project from and by excitement, which, from the start, posits an extraordinary political amplitude: to refuse to ratify the identification of criticism as melancholy, and to posit reflection and enjoyment as tasks in collective practices. In its ambition to go hand in hand with popular dreams, Deller’s work is also a glimpse of a variety of utopic moments located in experience and in all kinds of cultural practices. Under this light, it also makes sense that his work should appear as a demand for a fuller life, in the sense (as the spectacular advert he made for Swansea, Wales), that *More Poetry Is Needed*, 2012. Governed by the ambivalence of industrial society, which is, at the same time, hell and a glimpse of heaven on earth, one of the merits of his work lays in resisting the temptation to reduce the work to a mere documentary register.

Cuauhtémoc Medina and Amanda de la Garza, curators of the exhibition.



Installation shot of posters *Whats the City but the People?* on the London Underground, 2009

Deller’s contemporaneity is always a density, as shown in his diagram, entitled *The History of the World*, 1997, where elements as apparently unconnected as brass band music and acid house are, in fact, part of a greater allegory, which is none other but the thickness of a culture produced by the ongoing revolution of modernization. That same tendency to join unlikely opposites is present when he transforms a megalithic site, key to British identity, such as Stonehenge, in a full-scale inflatable theme park (*Sacrilege*, 2012), or when he asks London Underground train operators to take to the underground city all sorts of quotes from Shakespeare, Pascal or Ionesco in *What is the City But the People*, 2009. One could apply to Deller’s work the double passion that the artist himself has attributed to the heavy metal of bands like Judas Priest: to be “at the same time, a reenactment of the industrial process, and a requiem for its loss”.

What is most notable about this search is that it is not dominated by ideological commitment, but, instead, it responds in a much more efficient manner, to the extent that it doesn’t require attachment to a methodology. Deller belongs to the genealogy of those who, as argued by Charles Baudelaire a century and a half ago, don’t understand the artist as a “servant” of their media, but as a “man of the world”, who “appreciates everything happening on the surface of our sphere”<sup>1</sup> and has curiosity as the starting point of their work. But, while, during the mid-nineteenth century, Baudelaire faced the challenge of a beauty constantly revolutionized by the “infinitely variable ideal of happiness”, Deller registers a world of multiplied social passions. Art cannot pretend to be superior to any of them, it can only take into account the fact of containing and highlighting the energy of the collective. Although many of his essential works have the importance of researching “the popular”, or the aesthetics of participation, what defines them is, above all, their open and worldly character.

<sup>1</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “El pintor de la vida moderna”, in: Salones y otros escritos sobre arte, Trad. Carmen Santos, 3ª Edición, Madrid, A. Machado Libros, 2005. (La Balsa de la Medusa, 83), p. 356-357.

<b>Jeremy Deller.</b> <i>The Infinitely Variable Ideal of the Popular</i>	13 feb — 7 jun 2015	<b>Exhibition tours</b> Frydays and Sundays 18:30 h.
<b>Curators</b>	Amanda de la Garza and Cuauhtémoc Medina	
<b>Publication</b>	<b>Catálogo</b> with texts by Dawn Ades, Jeremy Deller,	Hal Foster, Cuauhtémoc Medina y Ferran Barenblit
<b>Other exhibitions</b>	<b>Selección Colección Fundación ARCO</b> Until 8 mar 2015	<b>Carlos Garaicoa.</b> <b>Orden Inconcluso</b> Until 8 mar 2015
	<b>Naturaleza nominal.</b> <b>ARCO Colombia 2015</b> 28 feb — 26 apr 2015 (Alberto Baraya, Milena Bonilla, Adriana Salazar y Carlos Bonil)	<b>Punk. Sus rastros en el arte contemporáneo</b> 26 mar — sep 2015
<b>Activities</b>	<b>Vegetable Garden on the Roof</b> Workshop of vegetable gardening on the roof Fridays 11:30 — 13:00 h	<b>Sundays at the Cinema</b> <i>Alô alô mundo!</i> <i>Cines de invención en la generación del 68</i> Sundays 1 mar — 12 apr 18:30 h.
	<b>Universidad Popular</b> <i>Pero... ¿Esto es arte? VII</i> Wednesdays 18 feb — 15 apr 18:30 h.	
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