

*WITHIN / BEYOND / NEITHER*  
*for*  
*CONSTRUCTION / CONSTRICTION*

---

# WITHIN/BEYOND/NEITHER

written and edited by

David K. Geer  
and  
Jesalyn Blount

2009 GOD CLUB  
for  
Construction/Constriction  
exhibit

Communities hold their semblance through reifying political and social constructs and constrictions which seek to define and re-produce or mimic the personal identifiers, shared experiences or interests of those who inhabit the communities' walls or boundaries. This is not to say that individuals do not wade through the social waters of various communities, nor does this mean communities do not overlap or become enveloped within other, differing, or reifying communal structures. Obviously, levels and degrees of difference between individuals exist, and are expected, within communities. However, community, in itself, is most often read or understood as signifying bordered and confined meanings with strict or, at the very best, somewhat permeable dividers that separate those "within" from those "outside of" a given communal structuring. Communities may often lend support to those within their boundaries, but they may also hinder, silence, and confine those who inhabit them—often being those who occupy their necessary margins. But what if community did not structure itself linearly, dualistically, or depend on the supposed necessities of margins and a center or those who occupy the "outside of?" How would this seemingly utopic (de)structuring visiblize itself or function?

Utopia, beyond its romantic posturing, is a problematically implosive ideology. Once utopia has been named, it has been structured and limited by the boundaries of our own knowledges and languages, rendering it no longer utopic or "perfect." The act of naming or defining utopia inherently sets utopia up for ineffectual failure and oppressive praxis, deploying a politics of absolution and re-constituting the very limitations and binary structures of not only language but the current foundations of community: normalcy and erasure of difference. Utopic communities must not be named and theorized as an end goal which can and must be obtained. Similar to community,

CONSTRUCTION / CONSTRICTION  
MARCH 7th 2009  
6:00 - 9:00 p.m.  
DETROIT MI

## ORIGINAL PRESS RELEASE:

On March 7th 2009, God Club, a Detroit-based, multi-disciplinary creative output label and collective, will be presenting an installation entitled Construction / Constriction. With plans to be the first of a series of exhibitions within non-traditional spaces, the event will take place between 6pm and 9pm at 1635 West Hancock Street in the Woodbridge / Cultural Center area of Downtown Detroit. The installation's premise is roughly centered on engaging with the relationships between artists and the art market, individuality and community, "and private and public space, in consideration of the critical possibilities that can arise from dialogues during artistic production and consumption. Collectively, the members of God Club have determined regulations and productive guidelines in order to aid in and challenge the creation of the installation. In order to construct the work, each of God Club's members have been restricted to a \$50 budget for materials, each member making purchases independently of one another, and keeping these purchases a secret until the day of the work's construction. During a series of meetings and dialogues having taken place prior to the event, the participants created a list of items that will not be used in the construction of the piece. Video and audio will be presented as part of the installation, produced only during the work's construction. A critical text drawing direct influence from the premise of the installation, functioning as both a separate and conjoining piece, will also be distributed to accompany the event.

## "CONSTRAINT" LIST:

### **DON'T**

- Use trash as art, use instead as material (no blatant use of cardboard, recyclables, re-purposed vintage paraphernalia, detritus isn't real...)
- Re-purpose mirrored objects
- Use text
- Bring pre-existing furniture, appliances or furnishings
- Use candles, mannequins, or candle mannequins
- No newspaper clippings, magazine clippings, or collage elements
- Use vice symbolism
- Use pre-existing imagery (pop culture, art history referencing ,etc.)
- Use clothing as art, similar to trash guideline
- No pre or post audio or video production
- Use money
- Incorporate perishable or live objects
- Incorporate any art objects created before the time of install.

ties, the erasure of difference, places us within a politics of stagnation and ineffectual regression. For if “the very idea of community (found or elective) presupposes closure: a circular return, ad nauseum, to the tedious logic of the Same,” as Gandhi has written, then this circular return that community depends upon requires a continuous attempt at breakage (26).

Breakage of the assimilating discourse of community can occur through a radical change in the ways individuals approach communal identification—a dismissal of community’s naturalized affiliation, an imposed fallacy, for the appropriation of a discourse of radical friendship, beyond homophilic structural dependency, as the process for anti-communitarian communitarianism. Gandhi offers a possible map for the relationship between a Derridean analysis of radical friendship and her theorization of anti-communitarian communitarianism, a concept that sees community as necessarily formed through its own erasure and disruption. A radical approach to friendship, unlike the fraternal, traditional concept of friends based on “natural” “citizenship within a structure, defaulted by identity, is a discourse of friendship that, according to Gandhi, finds its existence through philoxenia, “a love for guests, strangers, and foreigners” (29). Gandhi continues that “philoxenic solidarities introduce the disruptive category of risk,” furthermore writing:

[a]ny sort of friendship (local or global) is emotionally risky [...] [b]ut friendship towards strangers or foreigners, in particular, carry exceptional risks, as their fulfillment may at any time constitute a “felony contra patrium.” (29)

This felony that Gandhi speaks of is a disavowal of the “naturalness” and singularity of community formation, a disruption and antithesis of normative structuring, a giving over of oneself to vulnerability. However, it is possible that this discourse of “philoxenic” friendship is not applicable only to the formation of solidarity or collectivity of strangers. As a further move towards “philoxenic solidarity,” a discursive appropriation of this concept seems applicable to radical collectivity regardless of the position of individuals as already existing friends or strangers. For the revolutionary potential of “philoxenic solidarity” or friendship is its inherent focus on building relationships, community, through positions of vulnerability, risk, and the insistence of self-sacrifice. The discourse of friendship we are writing of refers to the openness, grit, and giving over of oneself that is experienced within the dangerous moments between friends. However this notion of friendship becomes more productive and disruptive, in relation to collectivity, when vulnerability, in the face and recognition of difference, is the catalyst for the friendship’s deployment. This is both a physical and emotional experience, and it must be transformed into a communal process—a process of creating

collectivity through emotion, self sacrifice, and necessary difference rather than “logic” and “organized” structure which merely depend on discourses of science and rationality, furthering a fallacy of fact by which to enter into a relationship or a “politics.” This is not to say that this application of radical friendship through collectivity as its process is not a structure in itself; however, it is a structure that inherently depends upon vulnerability. Vulnerability is a risk because it positions the individual as perpetually open, and perpetual risk within a process of building community disrupts the very groundwork a community can be built on, for it creates ruptures, lack, and void that are necessary for dismantling community from within and of its self. This risk and vulnerability as a radical discourse of friendship, appropriated from “philoxenic solidarity,” reaffirms difference because it is continuously open to dialogue. Collectivity built through a dialogic process, a reworking of the discourse or politics of friendship, an assumed, necessary vulnerability and risk, is possibly the disruptive step towards the dismantling of communities’ imposed fallacy of sameness, the lie of homogeneity.

### **God Club, Art as Dialogue, and Construction/Constriction**

Collaborative art owns a splintered dialogue, fractured from that which is created between the spectator and the art itself—something that exists prior to the spectatorship—semi-hidden, phantasmical, dare we say, magical in relation to (and even outside of or after) the spectator’s gaze. What we are speaking of exists between the art, its creator(s), and the existence of its process and dialogical production. A singular artist often engages in a dialogue with discourse whether being language and/or its products: aesthetics, histories, cultures; the dialogue constructs a discourse within discourses already available to the artist. The spectator in turn engages in this dialogue, partaking in the construction of its discourse, but does not finish it. This is an ongoing dialogue, an ongoing discourse. Communally produced art functions in a similar manner; however, there is a different dimension that takes form. Each person within the community is forming the piece by engaging with discourses available to her; however, this art, which each individual is helping to create, is produced through engagement with the collectivity of the work of the others within the community—taking part in a multifaceted dialogue, within multiple discourses of varying subjectivities. Communal, artistic production is a process of community formation and praxis which exists as inherently multilayered, given over to the spectator as a conglomeration of multiple knowledges and subject positions which exist both singularly and interconnected, beyond harmony through conceptual disharmonious-affirmation. Considering the multiple positions required for the piece’s production and “finality,” this art engages the spectator from an attempted,

de-centered position. This comparison of communally produced art and the work of a singular artist is not an attempt to privilege the former or problematically speak of it as superior. Instead, our comparison is intended to visibilize the ways in which the process of communally produced art can be one of the useful tools for building, and deploying the praxis, of radical collectivity. Art production can be a means in which community (de)structuring can begin to form and transform, “not through the manipulation of representational codes in painting or sculpture,” as Grant Kester has written,” but through processes of dialogue and collaborative production” (153). Collaborative production and dialogue is where we can play with the ideology of community and begin to formulate ideas on the possibilities of communal existence while giving ourselves over to the longing for communities that affirm difference.

Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 26  
 Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 81  
 Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 26  
 See Jacques Derrida’s *Politics of Friendship*  
 See Leela Gandhi’s “*Affective Communities*”  
 Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 29  
 Ibid.  
 Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 153

#### Works Cited

Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University P, 2005.  
 Gandhi, Leela. *Affective Communities*. Durham: Duke University P, 2006.  
 Jacques., Derrida., *The Politics of Friendship*. New York: Verso, 2006.  
 Kester, Grant H. *Conversation Pieces Community and Communication in Modern Art*. New York: University of California P, 2004.

As of March 7th, 2009 God Club is:

David S. Blunk II, Jesalyn Blount, David K. Geer, Justin Marshall,  
 Isaac Royale and Janine Surma.

More information about the artists and this project can be found at  
[www.godclub.org](http://www.godclub.org)

utopia is a concept in need of constant change, never a lived reality. Recognizing the inherent problemacies of community, as in its current formulations, and the phantom idealization of the utopic community is needed in order to begin a process of structuring radical collectivity that begins to dismantle both structure and community. As Leela Gandhi argues, community—if it is both a liberatory and silencing construction—must place its existence under constant erasure, longing for (subjective) criticisms and continuous change:

For if the very idea of community is, notwithstanding its necessity, from a postmodern perspective inevitably unworkable, in operative, negative, then we can only speak, under erasure, of an impossible community: perpetually deferred, “indefinitely perfectible,” yet-to-come.

The process in working towards an always changing concept of utopic community—always and infinitely unattainable because of its changing conceptualization—must be the focus of community formation. The purpose is the process, the constant flux and disruption, never to obtain a defined, end result; community must never wrap itself within the shrouds of absolutes. Community built through erasure of not only its current, but future, possible existences, represents the anti-manifesto from which this piece intends to offer some of the possibilities for building community as anti-community-collectivity built through the beautiful implosion of itself as a community.

#### **Process as Dialogue; Dialogic Communities**

*There is no difference between the touch and the sign that receives me and the self that I am, because the boundary is yet to be installed, the boundary between that other and this “I”—and, hence, the condition of their very possibility—is yet to take place.*

—Judith Butler

We would like to further a simple argument: community, a shared collectivity of individuals, can only undergo a radical existence through a process of critical dialogue entrenched in a celebration of difference. Dialogue is necessary for the formation of community; this is not to say, however, that a formulation of speaking is at the center of communal organizing. Instead, dialogue, in its radical potential, thirsts for constant criticism, affirmation, confrontation, and openness between individuals. Being in a state of effective dialogue requires the recognition of the existence of difference between individuals, for this recognition must occur for the dialogue to take place. Without recognition of difference, dialogue becomes merely a façade, a masquerade for a colonizing act of speaking at. Rendering community through a process that only reconstitutes the current structuring of communi