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Catastrophe Bonds: An Interview with Oliver Ressler

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CATASTROPHE

BONDS

OLIVER

RESSLER

Oliver Ressler

Catastrophe Bonds

**IMAGINE
A SOCIETY**

**IN WHICH PEOPLE HAVE A
SAY IN DECISIONS IN PRO-
PORTION TO THE DEGREE
THAT THEY ARE AFFECTED**

Carol & Robert Bush Art Center, St. Norbert College
Lawton Gallery, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay
February 26-March 29, 2018

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Catastrophe Bonds: An Interview with Oliver Ressler

This interview was conducted as an online exchange between Brandon Bauer and Oliver Ressler during the summer of 2017.

Brandon Bauer: When we were discussing this exhibition and deciding on the title, you suggested “Catastrophe Bonds,” which I was immediately drawn to for the layers of meaning I found in the phrase. Can you talk about what this phrase means to you, and why you proposed it for the title of the exhibition?

Oliver Ressler: Catastrophe bonds are financial derivatives and more or less what the name suggests: The holder gets a payout in the event of a specified natural or other disaster. In times when permanent financial and economic crisis and global warming – all themes that are addressed in this show – have become the new normal, catastrophe bonds will become more important. Central to the concept of the exhibition was the second meaning of bonds when choosing this title; it is the social solidarity under crisis conditions, the belief in people’s capacity to self-organize, that connects all of the works in this exhibition.


BB: Before diving into some questions about your work, I would like to ask, what were some of your earliest influences? What made you pursue art? How did you begin down the path to the work you have been developing throughout your career?

OR: I made the decision to become an artist as a teenager. I was interested in political issues at an early age; I wanted to find out about the world and how it functions. With 24 or 25 years, I managed for the first time to bring together these two fields of interest, art and politics – to merge them, to express political things through the means of art. While still being a student at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, I moved to installation and graphic works, which I managed for the first time to present in public space in the mid-1990s. I was interested and influenced by many different things. Political artists such as Hans Haacke, Martha Rosler, or John Heartfield definitely played an important role, but also ACT UP and the exhibition programs at Shedhalle in Zürich or Galerie Metropol in Vienna.

BB: I first encountered your work through the exhibition *The Interventionists*, curated by Nato Thompson at MASS MoCA in 2004, in which your video work *Disobbedienti* was exhibited. This piece documents a group of Italian activists engaged in civil disobedience actions during demonstrations against organizations like the WTO, IMF, and G8. They were a part of the broader movement against corporate globalization – often called the Global Justice Movement or alter-globalization movement – which has been described as a “movement of movements.” Given that you have been documenting these kinds of grassroots social movements – from the Global Justice Movement to Occupy Wall Street and the European Movement of the Squares, as well as the current Global Climate Justice movement – over the past two decades, what are your observations? It seems as if your documentation from inside these movements is meant to be instructive about how to engage in this kind of activism. How do you see these various movements as related, and how are they different? What do you think young activists can learn from these movements?

OR: All these movements are leaderless, horizontally organized movements. Decisions are being made directly, without representation. All confront the capitalist system, but in different ways. The Tute Bianche and *Disobbedienti* directly confronted the police, attempting to enter the red zones of the summits. This tactic was militarily defeated by extreme police violence at the demonstrations against the G8 summit in Genoa. Today’s tactics are smarter; many of the movements attempt not to directly confront police but use tactics such as the five-finger tactic to flow through police lines. A less-male concept is also more inclusive toward women and younger, less experienced people who are just about to join the movements. I think it is important to learn about all these kinds of activism as it enables people in struggles to use certain ideas and to apply them to what fits to the specific local contexts in which people are active. Therefore, my analytic films are also regularly used by activists.

BB: I find a consistent thread in your work of documenting social movements from a very intimate perspective. You do not create an objective remove between the camera and what is being documented, but that technique allows the viewer to become a fly on the wall as these movements negotiate their ideals, tactics, and strategies. A good example of this is your piece *Take the Square*, although this approach is used in




several works. Where did this approach to your work begin? What do you intend to convey with this approach?

OR: I first applied this method documenting a demonstration against the World Economic Forum in Salzburg (Austria) in 2001, where demonstrators were encircled in a police “kettle” and detained for seven hours. I was among the 900 encircled demonstrators. I created the film *This Is What Democracy Looks Like!* that consisted of voices of demonstrators from inside the kettle. I worked with several movements and, in broad terms, identify with these movements. This creates the possibility to establish situations where the only language comes from participants of the movements. For *Take the Square*, I initiated a situation that created the opportunity for activists from the Occupy and Square movements to speak. I asked four to six people to meet on one of the squares that were used for the occupations, adopted the existing format of the “working group” of the movements, and used it to make the participants discuss with each other along a few questions I outlined. These were primarily questions about organization, decision-making processes, and the meaning and the function of the occupation. I recorded a couple of these conversations at squares in Athens, Madrid, and New York, and the most interesting ones were used in an edited form in my film and three-channel video installation *Take the Square*.

BB: What do you see as your role in the movements you bring light to? Are you documenting? Are you participating? Is your work advocating on behalf of these movements?

OR: I think it is a combination of all of this. I felt the necessity to be involved in these movements. I think the involvement that makes the most sense for the movements and myself is to work with and about the movements, to produce something that can be used by the activists themselves. While my first films on the alter-globalization movement were driven from the desire to transfer this moment of excitement of a political event, in doing these films I became more and more aware how these pieces not only document reality but also construct reality. To participate in a movement opens certain windows, certain possibilities. Over the years I have participated internationally in a considerable number of people’s assemblies, working meetings of social movements, demonstrations, blockades, and mass actions of civil disobedience, and I have often



recorded these activities. For some time, I have been personally unsure whether my artistic work relating to activism should be described as activist work, or indeed whether I should be seen as a participant of these movements at all. Was I an activist by virtue of this activity, or was I rather a sympathetic observer positioned in solidarity with the object of research? I still have no definite answer to this question, partly because my practice of varying strategies between one project and the next could generate different answers in each particular case. But I have received an answer many times over from activists and movement participants when presenting and discussing my work both within an art-world context and outside it. Social movement activists have repeatedly told me they regard me as part of the movements because of the way I approach my work. They see my work as wholly unlike that of even the most personally sympathetic print or broadcast journalist, whose reporting is bound by a professional code of neutrality to eliminate all trace of such sympathies. Whether neutrality is epistemologically possible at all in politically contested matters is doubtful, to say the least; what is beyond doubt is that neutrality or impartiality in hegemonic media organizations means compliance with political precepts held to be self-evident.

BB: That is very interesting. Along with that, I have noticed in a number of interviews you are often asked if what you are doing is art and how you justify that position. Do you find this to be a tiresome question? I can imagine it could be frustrating to constantly justify what you do as art, even if your position in documenting these movements is not neutral or removed from the subject and the concerns they advocate.

OR: At the beginning of my artistic development I only had very few possibilities to publicly speak about my work. I remember I found it quite annoying to work a year on a project, accumulate such a lot of knowledge on a theme, and the audience is not so much interested in the theme itself, but more in the question whether this is art or not. I have the impression the more my work is presented internationally, the more my work was shown in major museums, festivals, and biennales, this question about the status of my work loses importance. What is defined as art is of course a question of negotiation, and the negotiation power of a major art institution is a big one. Today the question why what I am doing is art still pops up from time to time, but I don't care anymore. I have the feeling in the meantime the main focus is on the content of my work and the formats

and specific strategies I use to get the work done. This is a change that satisfies me a lot.

BB: Given the nature of your work, as we were just discussing, I can understand why this question is asked of you, but I think asking you to justify your work as art just skims the surface of what this question implies. What I am wondering, in a more in-depth way, is if you find that art and its related discourses offer something more to the dialog you are trying to engage that would not be possible if your work were more formally in the vein of documentary filmmaking, journalism, or academic study. What is it that the field of art offers your work that other forms of discourse do not or cannot?


OR: Some of my works have connections to critical, investigative journalism. But even in those works where this connection exists there might be elements in the work that would not be acceptable in journalism or in an academic study. I reject the idea of neutrality, and usually do not include the voices of representatives of the state or of corporations. Many of my works are being presented as multi-channel video installations in exhibitions, which allows experiencing the work while walking in the space. A spatial presentation creates new forms of visibility; the audience can explore different perspectives on a work while walking through an exhibition. Presenting the films with different actions of civil disobedience simultaneously, for example in the work *Everything's Coming Together While Everything's Falling Apart*, next to each other at the same time creates a much stronger impact than to see these actions one after another in a linear way like in a cinema. Also my work can take the form of photography or text and image montages that are being presented in public space or in exhibitions. These formats are even further away from the fields you mention. The field of art allows me to choose any of these formats according to what I need to carry out for a particular idea. I can also change the format in the process of production or editing, when I see another format fits better to the topic. I don't know any other field but art where I can work like this.

BB: I can see art offers flexibility in the way you approach communicating your ideas that other forms may not. I find the methods you employ in your work to be pragmatic. How would you describe your approach to making? How do you decide what strategies to employ to communicate your ideas?

How do you choose your subjects? What is that process like from the initial kernel of the idea to its final realization?

OR: There is no single answer for this question; it changes a lot from project to project. There are some projects where I hear about a specific theme and start thinking about how to best connect to it through an artwork. But I also get invitations from art institutions to work on a specific theme or to create work for a very specific context in a museum. There are projects where I need to raise funds myself, and other ones where the entire budget comes with an invitation. There are (smaller) projects that need to be done in a few weeks, others on which I work for five years. There are in any case topics that have been really central for me for many years – democracy, ecological issues, capitalism, resistance, and alternative organizing. Most of my projects stay within this wide field of interest. Working on my projects allows me to commit a lot of time to do research on themes I am interested in. This is quite a privilege. I try to learn as much as possible about a specific topic before I start to work. In this research phase I already start collecting different ideas of how I could proceed formally, which angles I should take, which people to involve. But I have no blueprint how to get work done. It is a quite open-ended process that leaves space to the many unexpected things that happen when engaging with other people and specific situations. While I prepared for a long-planned trip to Istanbul to shoot my film *There Are No Syrian Refugees in Turkey* as part of my solo exhibition at SALT Galata in 2016, the attempted coup d'état took place. This had, as one might imagine, quite an impact on my shooting that took place only a couple of days afterward. Everything that had already been agreed on before needed to be renegotiated, and the attempted coup d'état became a central element of the film.

BB: Very interesting. Thank you for that example; I think it speaks to the flexibility you have in your work. To follow up, while I see your methods as being pragmatic, you often use a straightforward approach to complex subjects and concepts by using very direct methods. The subjects you present are very idealistic, yet these ideals are often negotiated as they confront reality. This creates a very interesting, almost dramatic, tension in your work. Is this intentional – or do you think this is a product of the types of subjects, situations, and ideas you are addressing?



OR: This has something to do with the nature of the subjects. For example I have been working on factories where workers did find ways to organize labor under their own control, most recently for the film and video installation *Occupy, Resist, Produce*. As a result of their struggles and radicalization through the struggles, the workers come up with great ideas of how to run their business differently, in a democratic manner. But when you produce something you cannot really escape the fact that there is still capitalism all around you, that your product will need to compete with those produced from factories run upon capitalist principles and under exploitative conditions. It is very hard to establish a successful worker-controlled enterprise under these circumstances – nearly impossible. It works best in situations where many of these worker-controlled businesses exist, so that they can engage in trade with each other, establish their own market based on the principle of solidarity, as it happened in Argentina, or if they exist in a situation where they have access to governmental support, as has been the case in Venezuela. If you are a single recuperated business in a Western European country, the situation is very, very difficult, and sometimes the ideals the workers had at the beginning begin to melt.

BB: That example does get to some of those nuances your approach allows for. I have noticed that many of your works can be seen either as a single-channel film or as a multi-channel installation. How do you determine this? Do you set out to create flexible works that can function in these different formats from the beginning, or is it more of a fluid process depending on the way the work takes shape as you are developing it? What decisions is it dependent upon?

OR: In most cases it is decided in the editing process whether it will be a single- or multi-channel video installation. For exhibitions, the multi-channel video installations work really well. Their disadvantage is they cannot be presented anywhere outside of exhibition spaces. My work very often is based on the voices of people in struggles, and I think the work I am doing that is based on these people's knowledge and experience must also be given back to them in a format they can access and share. Therefore, I also produce one-channel versions of many of my multi-channel video installations. So some of my larger works exist as films and video installation, and in some cases even related photographic works are produced as well.

BB: I have noticed in much of your video work you favor the mid-shot, particularly in interviews. What draws you to this shot type in your work?

OR: I assume it is simply the wish to put the speaking person in the center of the work. I like people who analyze the situation in which they are and let us learn about their specific struggles talking in front of the camera from a strong position. I do not only want to show the faces, but also part of the bodies, to see the gesticulating hands. And especially if you film not single people but groups of people talking to each other, the mid-shot is the most likely section to choose. It also leaves plenty of space for subtitles, as all my films get translated in different language versions.

BB: You have collaborated on a couple of films with Zanny Begg. These pieces have a distinct sensibility about them with the incorporation of animation. Can you talk about these collaborations? How did they come about? What is the collaborative process like in creating these works?


OR: I have been collaborating with Zanny Begg since 2007, when we started to work on our film *What Would It Mean to Win?* that merged interviews with activists, material recorded at the G8 blockades in Heiligendamm (Germany) with three animation sequences. Zanny has been doing drawings before, but this was the first time she did animation for a film. While in our first film, we were together while shooting and editing; in the collaborations that followed we shared the responsibilities and got the work done with each of us working on different parts of the production on different continents. For the film *The Bull Laid Bear* (2012), I carried out the interviews with economists and activists on the financial crisis and recorded them in different cities in the U.S. in front of a blue-screen, while Zanny did the animation work. This animation allowed us to construct a kind of semi-fictitious narration around the fraudulent bankers, dumb governments, and corrupt courts. It is a really interesting aspect of the film to construct a reality through animation that is not more unreal or fictitious than the “reality” presented to us as the reality of the economy, according to which we are still meant to believe neoliberal paradigms – for example, that private enterprises are more efficient than the state. The editing work we did together, but geographically distant from each other, with Zanny being based in Sydney, and myself in Vienna. Tight production budgets often do not allow us to meet, so we rather discuss everything via Skype.

BB: Your installation *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* is a pivotal piece in your *oeuvre*. Can you talk about how that piece came about? What was the initial impetus for it?

OR: I worked on *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* between 2003 and 2008, before the financial and economic crisis. I was kind of inspired by the well-known quote by Margaret Thatcher, “There is no alternative,” and thought it might be interesting to collect a few concepts or models that I considered important when we actually discuss alternatives. Of course, I am sure there must be an alternative. It was important not to highlight one concept, but to present several. Up to 2008, I produced 16 videos, each describing one model. A real democratic society cannot be achieved through a master plan that someone has in mind. It needs to be a large democratic process based on broad dialogue, involving as many people as possible. It has to be a kind of open, transparent, bottom-up development process. The idea of *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* was to create a space for thought, where people could inform themselves about the theme and strengthen their ideas of how a different economy and society might look.

BB: The scope of *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* is very ambitious; you are tackling big ideas in this installation. It seems, from what I have read, it came together in different stages and interviews were added in different iterations of the installation. Can you talk about the process of developing this work? How were interview subjects decided? How was the project funded? How many years did it take to come to its final shape, and how many versions did it go through before it came to its final state?

OR: I started the project with two solo exhibitions at Galerija Škuc in Ljubljana (Slovenia) in 2003 and at Kunstraum der Universität Lüneburg (Germany) in 2004. That included five videos that were funded as part of a project by eipcp, the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies. *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* was very successful from the beginning; I received numerous invitations to present it and traveled around with the project for several years. Whenever it was possible, I took part of the exhibition budget to create one more video. It finally became a 16-channel video installation in 2007. Even though I considered the project as ongoing and open-ended, I stopped working on it in 2008. Of




course my interest in alternatives continued, but I was keen on working in different formats and other contexts. *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* includes different models that were influenced by a socialist- or anarchist-thinking tradition, highlighting different ideas of direct decision-making processes and self-management, and aiming at flat hierarchies.

BB: The *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* installation seems to be generating a second wave of critical response. I know it was recently presented in the Museum of Capitalism in Oakland, California, and now it is here as the anchor for this survey of your work. What do you think of the reassessment and renewed interest in this installation?

OR: *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* was presented in 21 exhibitions between 2003 and 2008, in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Even though I had some of my works presented in the U.S., this specific installation was never presented in the U.S. It appears the extreme right-wing political shift has helped a bit in bringing *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* to North America. For me, it is exciting to install this work again, which is still the largest installation I worked on, and I am super-curious to learn how it will be perceived and if it will be able to generate a debate.

BB: Your installation *What Is Democracy?* has similarly been experiencing a critical reevaluation and was recently exhibited as a part of Documenta 14, in Kassel, Germany. What do you think of the reassessment and the renewed interest in this work?

OR: Both *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* and *What Is Democracy?* are closely connected with each other. While *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* directly draws on the knowledge of economists, political scientists, or historians who wrote or did profound research on specific models or concepts, *What Is Democracy?* is based on conversations with activists in 18 different cities around the world. They criticize the hegemonic model of representative democracy and refer to ideas of how democracy could be imagined differently, in a sense of really involving people in decision-making processes. We as a society are facing a multifaceted crisis – an economic, ecological, social, and political crisis. As my work not only analyzes and criticizes, but also provides space for




different forms of alternative organizing, there seems to be much interest in my work these days.

BB: The curators of Documenta 14 staged what has been described as a combative press conference during the Kassel opening, where they pledged to fight neofascism. The election of Donald Trump in the U.S. and Brexit in the U.K. are most often cited as harbingers of this new wave of reactionary politics across the U.S. and Europe. At the same time, there have been a number of events after the U.S. presidential election and after Brexit that seem to be halting the momentum of this Western right-wing populist revolt. Given your analysis and critique of politics over the last couple of decades, do you see these trends as a cause for alarm or as an aberration? Should artists and activists be rethinking their tactics in the face of neofascism, or do you see that analysis of the current political situation as alarmist?

OR: I see the entire political shift to the right as a central tendency of the past two decades, not only in the U.S. and in the U.K. This has clearly economic reasons. It has to do with the widening gap between rich and poor, which makes it more and more difficult to survive in this jungle. The pumping of trillions of dollars into the global financial system, into the pockets of banks, shareholders, and the super-rich, only leaves austerity for the majority. I see this increased inequality as a main reason for the right-wing antiestablishment backlash. Even the World Economic Forum, the annual gathering of world business and political leaders in Switzerland, warned that the growing concentration of income and wealth at the very top of society is the biggest single risk to the stability of the economic and political order. I hope the resistance against this shipwreck known as the economy will become stronger in the coming years globally, and I hope cultural producers can play an active role in this much-needed social transition process. Therefore I try to produce work that is not only informative, but also mobilizes people to become active.

BB: You have been critiquing representative forms of democracy for some time, and making an argument for more-direct forms of democratic engagement. In your work, you highlight the way activist organizations enact direct forms of democracy organizationally. Are there examples you are aware of that demonstrate a larger, more scalable way of enacting direct democracy in society as a way to move beyond representative forms?




This is an issue that was touched upon in your piece *What Is Democracy?* What is your answer to this question?

OR: Yeah, there are a few examples. The most well-known probably is the autonomous self-governed region of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. Those capable of seeing behind this veil of lies generated by corporate media (and also a few more leftist ones) will find large-scale experiments involving millions of people in direct decision-making processes in Venezuela. The system of *Consejos Comunales* (community councils) was the most successful around 2010 when Venezuelans had the possibility to decide on their concerns collectively via assemblies in more than 30,000 *Consejos Comunales*. But direct decision-making also spreads to the economy; today, we find lots of worker-controlled companies.

BB: You focus considerable energy on documenting nonhierarchical direct forms of democracy in which consensus decision-making is the goal. While that may be laudable in these activist organizations, where everyone involved is working toward the same goal, how do you think that would translate into a larger form of social organization, especially in increasingly ideologically divided societies? If an obstruction occurs in representative forms, where an impasse can be overcome by the will of a majority, wouldn't consensus lead to the possibility of even more obstruction?

OR: Some groups move away from consensual decisions when they feel it does obstruct their work. Sometimes consensus is impossible to reach and those people who want to do something together move forward with what they want to achieve. Some groups decided a qualified majority is sufficient to take certain actions. I believe the most important thing is to build alliances between different groups who can agree on a set of terms to reach a specific goal (an action consensus). Those who don't agree simply do not participate. Certain ideals such as consensus must never be sacrosanct; otherwise, the result will be immobility and inaction.

BB: You have spent a great deal of time critiquing capitalism as an economic model in different ways, from the dictates of the market to the unregulated forms of post-Soviet capitalism, as well as the effects of the 2008 financial crisis and your investigations into theoretical alternatives to capitalism. Where did this vein of your work come from? When did you begin tackling capitalism as a central subject of your critique?




OR: In the mid-1990s, early in my artistic development, I was primarily focusing on ecological issues and this complex of immigration, right-wing politics, and borders. Working on and reading about these themes it became obvious that these issues have a common basis, which is capitalism. It was just much more difficult to address this directly in public at the time, in comparison with today. The aftershocks of the global financial crisis changed many people's perceptions. In most Western European countries, the majority of people know capitalism isn't working to their advantage. The question stays: How to overcome it, through which strategies, and how to establish a truly democratic system?

BB: I can see that as a central question in your work, which leads to my next question: Several philosophers, from Fredric Jameson to Slavoj Žižek and others, have made the claim that for the prevailing ideology it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism. I would say that much of your work refutes this ideology and suggests ways that the end of capitalism is something that can be envisioned. What are your thoughts on how capitalism limits our imagination to think beyond it?

OR: Well, the problem is, if we do not manage to end the capitalist system, "the end of the world" might come for more and more people as further regions and states will fail, will be governed by even more corrupt and fascist governments; the transnational corporations will take over even more of the existing wealth; and, as David Harvey states, the accumulation through dispossession will be intensified, pushing hundreds of millions in the Global South over the edge. But also, too-quick changes will lead to catastrophes. This will require a democratically driven transition period, the direction of which will be formed as a result of negotiation between emancipatory movements.

BB: Do you think that capitalism by its nature will always interfere with the functioning of democracy, or is there a market-based economic model that would be compatible with a direct democratic society? How does one create a liberatory economy? Perhaps this question is really about bringing us full circle again to the *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* installation: What are some of the alternative economic models that, in your view, hold the most promise for a world beyond capitalism?


OR: It is clear that the current system of neoliberal capitalism is not



compatible with direct democracy. Switzerland is a country with strong components of direct democracy. There are numerous cases when voters elected against their own interests, because they are afraid economic problems might occur otherwise. For example, in a referendum some years ago, Swiss people voted against limiting the payment of CEOs in corporations to 12 times of the lowest-paid staff because the industry was lobbying heavily against it, arguing it would undermine Switzerland's competitiveness. I think it will be impossible to run our complex societies without a certain amount of economic planning, especially for larger infrastructure projects, energy, public transport, etc., that require international coordination. This is also important ecologically, as global warming requires an incredibly large investment globally in new zero-energy housing, new public transport infrastructure, and investment in solar energy and windmills to outrun fossil fuels. And you can hand over a lot of economic activity to workers' control. Concepts such as Michael Albert's "Participatory Economy" or Takis Fotopoulos' "Inclusive Democracy" outline some brilliant ideas. But, as said, how the future economy will look will need to be decided through democratic means by movements in struggle.

BB: With this being the first survey of your work in the United States, what are your thoughts about the selection of works chosen for this exhibition? I know the threads the curatorial team were attempting to bring together in our selection of works, but what are your perceptions? What are the central ideas you see running through the works on view? Is there any work you would have liked to see added to the exhibition, or excluded?


OR: If there were works I wished to exclude, you can be sure I wouldn't have made them available for a presentation. I had several larger survey exhibitions in the past few years in Europe, most recently at MNAC – National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest; SALT Galata, Istanbul; and Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo – CAAC, Seville. In some, I was given a carte blanche and was free to present whatever works I wished. I, in part, took over the job of the curator as well, which gave me the possibility to review a few earlier works and to see how they work in a dialogue with newer works. I really love this work of looking back and seeing what is still valid. It is a bit different this time in that the curatorial team had a quite precise idea what they wanted to present. This has given me an opportunity to learn through this process which existing works the



curators think are of importance given the current political crisis in the United States.

BB: I do have one final question for you: Who or what currently inspires you, currently motivates you? What pushes you and your ideas forward? Also, is there anything you find yourself returning to as an inspirational ground, something or someone that continues to nourish you?

OR: I draw inspiration out of so many things. These can be self-organized autonomous zones, such as the ZAD in the west of France. I love meeting interesting people, activists, artists, filmmakers, and writers. I enjoy browsing the web doing research and to see exhibitions. Also, to participate in demonstrations or activities of civil disobedience can be really empowering. All these things combined provide inspiration for my work. I could come up with an idea for a new project every week. I am full of zest for action. The only limitation is a day's limitation of 24 hours.



The multi-site exhibition *Catastrophe Bonds* represents the first survey of the work of Austrian artist Oliver Ressler to be exhibited in the United States. The exhibition and its related public programming were developed as a collaborative project sponsored by the art programs at St. Norbert College and the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, and through the joint International Visiting Scholars Program of the two institutions. The exhibition was curated by Brandon Bauer, associate professor of art, St. Norbert College, in association with Shan Bryan-Hanson, curator of art galleries and collections, St. Norbert College, and Kate Mothes, curator of the Lawton Art Gallery, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. The exhibition focuses on forms of grassroots democracy as well as economic and political alternatives to the existing state of global affairs. A key unifying theme running through the work is that of envisioning and attempting to enact new forms of vibrant social and economic democracy, where all voices are welcomed in the deliberative process. This theme is explored through documentary work highlighting grassroots organizing efforts, through video interviews with contemporary thinkers on alternative social and economic models and their historic precedents, and through an examination of the pressures that the current catastrophes of climate change and emergency migration are having on Western representative democracies.

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