

bootprint



a publication dedicated to contemporary art

Volume #1 Issue #1



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Chicago, IL, United States

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"A conversation with Fatos Üstek"
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Serkan Özkaya and Vasif Kortun

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"Never give out your password or credit card number in an instant message conversation."
Istanbul, Turkey

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to contemporary art

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Table of Contents

The Politics of Friendship by Juan William Chávez	6
10 Fingers 88 Teeth by Tim Ridlen	7
Whoop Dee Doo by Jamie Warren with an introduction by Jon Peck	8
A word with Miguel Calderón by Juan William Chávez	9
Kling & Bang by Tim Ridlen	10
A conversation with Fatos Üstek by Isil Egrikavuk	12
SubCity Projects by Candida Alvarez	13
White Flag Projects by Georgia Kotretsos	14
Diversions and Detours in the Realm of Art Publishing by Ian Morrison	16
Democratizing the Art World, One Blog at A Time by Megan McMillan	17
Archiving the Future: The Media Burn Independent Video Archive by Tim Ridlen	18
Stalking the Continuum by Adelheid Mers	18
Crisis of Linearity by Vilém Flusser (1988) First translation into English by Adelheid Mers (2006)	18
Some simple thoughts without any wish to make them more profound* by Anne-Laure Oberson	22
Never give out your password or credit card number in an instant message conversation by Serkan Özkaya and Vasif Kortun	23
Destroy Athens Biennial by Georgia Kotretsos	25
Some Words with Mary Jane Jacob by Juan William Chávez	26
A Closer Look at St. Louis Contemporary Art: Interview with Shannon Fitzgerald by Georgia Kotretsos	27

editor-in-chief

Boot Print is the soundest manifestation of a long-standing inquiry to record and share contemporary art through the eyes of artists. I've been a loyal fan of the manner in which artists communicate with each other. The value I see in engaging in a constructive dialogue with fellow artists is that it always brings me a step closer to understanding and appreciating something new about art. This need to engage in critical dialogue is an extension of my practice and it is of equal importance to the work I produce.

By making short documentaries or developing a digital art publication with Juan, and by hosting a radio show with Juozas at SAIC back in Chicago, we managed to lay down a foundation that now allows us to work together, when in reality we are so far apart. With Tim's interest in developing a publication in an electronic form and Bryan's design experience, Boot Print consists of a dedicated team that works together towards this vision.

Note from Georgia Kotretsos

There was a lot of talk among the agents on cataloging the Boots events in a way that would allow us to be creative in regards to format and distribution. I was particularly opposed to the idea based on our mission, the cost, and the long-term sustainability of the project. My criticism was that often exhibition catalogs serve as photo-albums, hollow in content. With that said, when done well, they have the potential to be an original document in their own right.

I started flirting with the idea of a tabloid paper last summer. After researching electronic as well as traditional art publications we arrived at Boot Print. Early in the fall, we posted an open call for submissions on the Boots website as well as on several other websites and blogs. At the same time, there were certain individuals whose work I had closely followed over the years, and I had come to respect and appreciate. I invited those individuals to contribute to the first issue of Boot Print as guest contributors. Some invitations were open and others very specific. I thank all the contributors who responded to the open call with such enthusiasm and those who accepted my invitation and helped me set the tone for the upcoming issues. Special thanks goes to White Flag Projects, Ellen Curlee Gallery, Bruno David Gallery, the St. Louis Regional Arts Commission, the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, the Qbox Gallery, the Boot Print friends, the St. Louis art community and the silent partners of Boots for supporting us in raising the funds to publish Boot Print. I'm mostly thankful to Juan who has been behind the project since day one, to Tim whose input, energy and dedication is exemplary, to Joe for pointing out our mess-ups, and finally to Bryan for his commitment and fitting design.

Boot Print is an organic biannual publication based on improvisational modes of production dedicated to contemporary art. Volume I Issue I covers Boots exhibitions and happenings; looks at five different models of artist-run spaces in Mexico, Iceland, Turkey and United States; discusses forms of arts publishing and distribution; features Adelheid Mers insightful diagrammatic chronicle alongside Vilém Flusser's *Crisis of Linearity* (1988), the first translation into English; and last, speaks with established curatorial voices about their practice, the local and international art scene, as well as the debutant Destroy Athens Biennial.

I'll keep my ear to the ground for your feedback and await your responses. This is a publication that will evolve with time. Your interest and involvement in Boot Print is welcomed and appreciated. **BP**

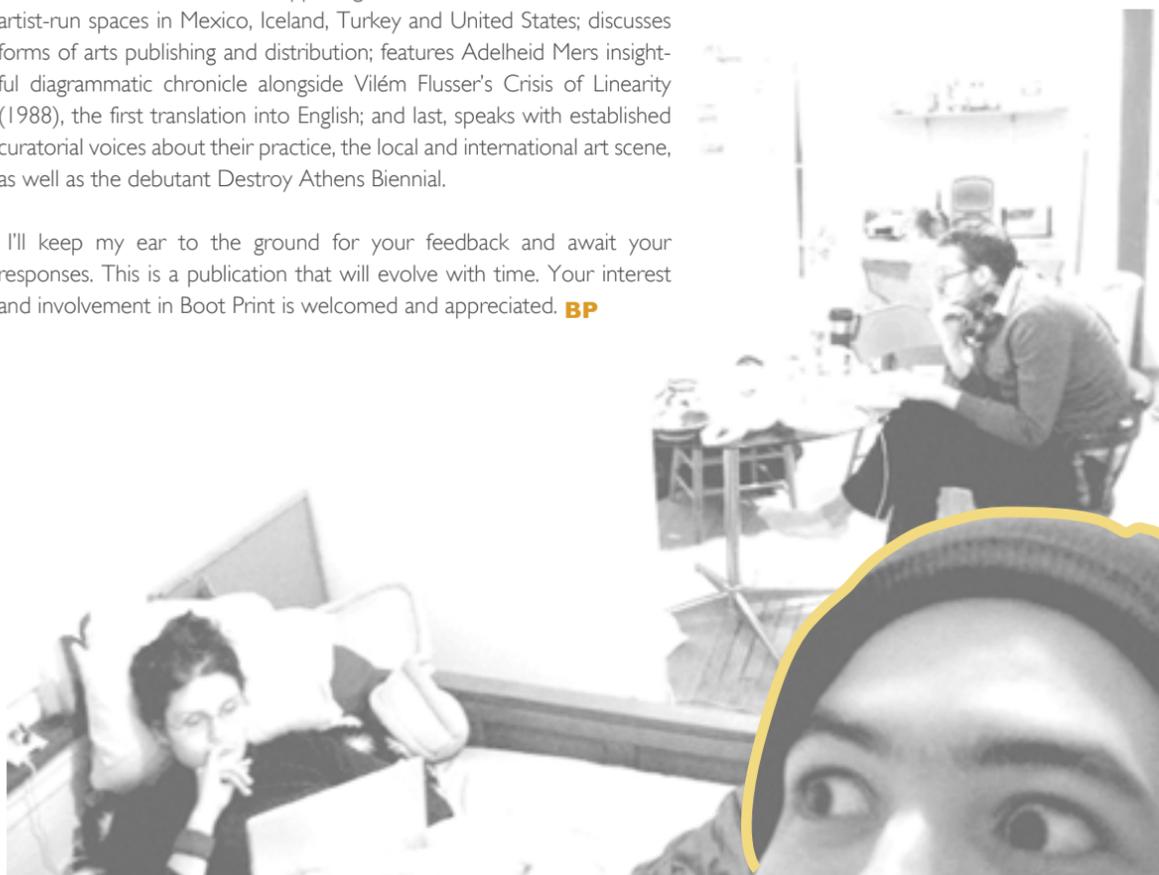
Growing up in St. Louis, I had worked closely with two other people playing music, writing songs, and putting out records. It's safe to say we didn't know what we were doing then, but we did it well. My memories of the city are mostly from playing in bars — well before I was old enough to be there otherwise — and of course, having band practice in my parents' basement. When I moved away from St. Louis, I never saw any reason to go back. What's happening there now with contemporary art is yet to be determined—and I still haven't moved back — but the recent energy is proof that something is in the air.

As an artist, I'm committed to the practice of critical writing in order to expand the opportunities for artists to communicate with each other. To this aim, I had always wanted to develop a publication in some kind of electronic form. When Juan and Georgia presented the idea of starting a publication for print, I had to take the opportunity — and I couldn't have asked for better company. In St. Louis I was driven by the dedication of the people around me. Boot Print offers me the opportunity to return to St. Louis, without going back, and work towards something critical.

For the first issue of Boot Print, we spent five days holed up in my apartment or at the cafe down the street editing some great texts by, among others, Adelheid Mers, Candida Alvarez, and Ian Morrison, all people I had come to know while at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I see great value in Adelheid's translation of Vilém Flusser's "*Crisis of Linearity*," the first translation into English. Hopefully, we can continue with the high standards we have set for ourselves. I am grateful to everyone that has contributed. **BP**

Note from Tim Ridlen

assistant editor



Note from Juan William Chávez

director of Boots Contemporary Art Space



The inspiration for Boots all started four years ago in Chicago while I was at the School of the Art Institute for an MFA. Two things that really had an impact on me were Mary Jane Jacob's sculpture seminar, and the many alternative spaces that were popping up all over the city, along with the energy they created for young artist and curators. The seminar focused on the artist's ability to make something out of nothing, using that potential to initiate projects that broaden your art practice and narrow the gap between studio and vocation. The alternative spaces and the artists in the city had a really good energy. As a collective, artists were initiating spaces in garages, elevators, rooftops, or wherever. And it was not just physical space — websites, blogs, podcasts, DVDs and Quicktime videos — nothing was off limits. It was whatever you had, and if you didn't have it, you found someone that did or you learned how to do it yourself.

In 2006, I moved back to St. Louis. There was a fresh new vibe in the air. The institutions had revitalized the contemporary art scene, and the artists were feeling it. There was also a sweet little alternative scene happening down on Cherokee street. Art was in the air and I wanted to be part of it. For a couple of months I did some research on resources that were available to artists. I did not want to repeat anything, but at the same time I wanted to find something that would scratch the itch I developed in Chicago. My network of artist-friends was all over the world, but I wanted to work with them. It was ludicrous to think every one was going to move to St. Louis — they had their own lives and careers — but as it turned out, that would work in our favor. It would

be challenging, but unique, to create an ART LAB with a network of artists across the globe. It would prove you could be part of a collective without physically being there. Plus it would help stimulate a creative dialogue between the Saint Louis art community and the global contemporary art world. So then, I gave out the S.O.S., and the artists that stepped up to the plate were Bryan Reckamp, Georgia Kotretsos, and Jonathan Peck. Now, all we needed was a space.

Living on Cherokee Street, I really liked the neighborhood with its alternative art scene and I wanted to contribute to it. So, I started looking for buildings in this neighborhood, and I found Boots. Located in the historic Antique Row District on Cherokee Street, this shotgun brick building was once a shoe repair shop in the early 1900's. The fading images of boots on the storefront served as the inspiration for the name. The building needed a lot of work, so once again I called on some friends to pull it together. Needless to say, Boots would not have been possible without the help of Bryan Reckamp and all of his hard work, designing everything from page to web; Georgia Kotretsos for spreading the word and starting up Boot Print; Jonathan Peck for curating and being part of the think tank; The Chi-town crew for pitching in; Mike and Ryan for the elbow grease; Andy and John for the behind-the-scenes; friends and family for the support; Patricia and Mike with the fine details; Kiki and Juan for being the coolest; and to the St. Louis art community for rocking out. So I hope you stay tuned and keep an eye on us. **BP**

Party to Publish

photos: Paul Nordmann



Boots Contemporary Art Space, to date, has been an artist funded initiative. We come up with projects and then figure out a way to pull them off. It has taken a lot of hard work, long nights with little sleep, and (perhaps most importantly) the help from others. That's why it came as no surprise that the St. Louis art community rallied up to make the production of Boot Print possible by attending our fundraiser *Party to Publish*.

The event was held January 27, 2007, in the bohemian environment of Joe's Café. Owner Bill Christman, was more than generous to let us party for the night. On a backlit stage, spinning music, was *Great Rivers Biennial* artist Jason Wallace Triefenbach and wife Julie (www.myspace.com/jasonwallacetriefenbach). Chilling out, local artists sat around café tables, shooting the shit while drinking beers and puffing on cigs. The party was definitely kindling for grander events to come.

Special thanks to Andrew Hagene and his professional event-promotion skills. To Mr. Christman for keeping the spirit of Gas Light Square alive and to Kevin, Andrew, Roger, Carroll, and Jesse for holding down the fort. To Paul and Sara for documenting the love and to the all artists and friends that supported us that night. All of us at Boots deeply appreciate it. **BP**

Artist run. Artist funded.

The Politics of Friendship

by Juan William Chávez



Juan William Chávez

Juozas Cernius

Jon Peck

Tim Ridlen

Bryan Reckamp

Beate Engl

Georgia Kotretsos

Rosalynn Gingerich

Isil Egrikavuk

Somewhere better than this place.

Boots Contemporary Art Space provides an uninhibited "art-lab" environment for artists to experiment and exhibit. *The Politics of Friendship* was Boots' inaugural exhibition. We wanted the exhibition to speak about the formation and structure of Boots and other artist-run spaces while embracing the Boots mission of bringing national and international art and artists to St. Louis. We demonstrated the simple recipe of an artist-run space: find a space, find a handful of artists, and get people through the door.

Without giving a step-by-step recount of the work, I would like to recreate the overall feel of the show, which I found to be smart and ambitious, yet intimate. Outside the front door, visitors were met by the loud echo of a speech by Rosa Luxemburg: *Die weltpolitische Lage (The global political situation)*, held on

May 27th, 1913 in Leipzig-Plagwitz, Germany, an audio installation by Beate Engl entitled *Betaversion 3.0*. Upon entering the front gallery, a speaker above the door sounds off the English translation of the same speech. This set the tone as being somewhat political if you were willing to listen. On the first wall immediately to the right, Georgia Kotretsos had two framed Felix Gonzalez-Torres copies from the *Untitled (Lover Boys) 1991* stacks, taken from the *Minimalism and Beyond* exhibition at The Pulitzer Foundation earlier in the fall, to which she then added her own twist. By cutting out the silhouettes of the people who took them, it pointed to and echoed the relationship between the viewer and the artwork, while at the same time addressed issues of authorship. Next, addressing the controversy over capital punishment in Missouri, art-

ist Juozas Cernius showed a human skull with a wooden case and stand entitled *20th century Quaker*. Adjacent to it was a piece entitled *Cocktail* an intimate, wooden frame that had three glass tubes filled with sodium thiopental, potassium chloride, and pancuronium bromide; respectively the three chemicals used for lethal injection.

Past the threshold of the second room, the space was filled by the sound of a man speaking about his experience with an unarmed army in a foreign country. This is a video, suspiciously absurd, mounted high on the back wall, by Isil Egrikavuk. Switching between English and Turkish, as well as rehearsed and unrehearsed dialogue, the *Infamous Library* draws a fine line between fiction and reality. Also questioning the truth of the image, Tim Ridlen's back lit

transparency shows a seemingly real world, a scene on the windowsill of makeshift shelves. The photograph is a composite of four different images taken over a short period of time. To offset the gravity of the show, Jon Peck's meticulously crafted paper *Untitled Self-Portrait (Costume)*; Bryan Reckamp's propped canvases; and Rosalynn Gingerich's pink, minimalist assemblage added a sculptural and colorful element to the show. Suffice it to say, these pieces also brought the heat.

Over 400 people came throughout the opening night. Drinking beer, smoking cigs, playing rock music, and looking at art in an old boot repair shop down on the south side of St. Louis. It was a good feeling, and we will be doing it again. **BP**

10 Fingers 88 Teeth

by Tim Ridlen



10 Fingers 88 Teeth | drawing study | 2006



Installation study | 2006



Piano Dismantling Operations | video | 1997

Throughout recent art history pianos have been dismantled, disassembled, dropped, destroyed, fragmented and burned as part of live performances or art objects. In this rather *deconstructive* manner, the following selected emblematic examples of this genre are: Tan Dun, *Organic Music* project, 2005; Clemens von Wedemeyer, *Big Business*, 2002; Monna Sakai, Lewis Matsuo, Akiko Ootsuka, Suguru Goto, Masahiro Miwa, Satoru Wono, Yukito Ueda, Sumihisa Arima, Jiro Hirano, Kazuhisa Uchihashi, Yoshihiro Kawasaki, Yasuji Yamahata, Masayuki Eguchi, Takahito Toyama, Daisuke Ishikawa, Toshiyuki Kimura, Takashi Shiraishi, Toshihiro Shirakawa, Kazunari Kobayashi, Hisakazu Moriwaki and Masayuki Akamatsu, *Piano Dismantling Operations*, 1997; Nam June Paik, *Piano Piece*, 1993; Arman, *Chopin's Waterloo*, 1962; Annea Lockwood, *Piano Burning - Piano Transplant* series, 1969; Al Hansen, *Yoko Ono Piano Drop*, 1960's Fluxus happening (Dropped from a roof-top), in addition to several Fluxus performances lead by George Maciunas, Phil Corner, Ben Patterson, Dick Higgins, Emmett Williams and others who have worked with pianos in a similar manner.

The work of Georgia Kotretsos is audience oriented, meaning each conceptual project is based on the audience that will view it. "Although I had visited St. Louis on several occasions in the past, I never before had to think of ways to create an aesthetic and conceptual experience for a St. Louis audience;"

Kotretsos says. She began looking into St. Louis' history and soon discovered its rich musical tradition. With this in mind, the piano stood out as an emblematic instrument/object of this tradition with remarkable history in Europe, and a distinct transformation and revitalization later in the United States. From this research, it became evident St. Louis was close to the instrument visually, aurally, and culturally.

Kotretsos clarifies, "Although the audience is the departure point for all of my projects, I always bring the conversation back to art and try to be aware of the difference between 'audience oriented' and provincial artwork that could result in narrow casting my work." Calling on Art History, artworks that incorporate pianos as a symbol of Western culture enable us to see homogenous thematic and visual standpoints or approaches employed by artists since the 1960's. It is evident throughout art history that piece after piece opposed tradition and manifested opposition by deconstructing the instrument's frame and body, yet Western culture continued to remain invulnerable to the challenges.

10 Fingers 88 Teeth is a metaphor that focuses on the tactics artists and individuals choose to employ when dealing with matters they are opposed to. The tradition, sound, and authority of the instrument often prevent us from critically re-thinking its role and value in society. For this reason, at first glance, pianos seem

to be stably attacked by artists as if they are threatening beasts, which may shake, sway and undermine the image most hold of the instrument. "I wanted to put myself in a position where I would challenge the perception of its *beast-like* qualities, where I would follow and adopt the tradition and take on the risk of getting 'hurt,'" she says.

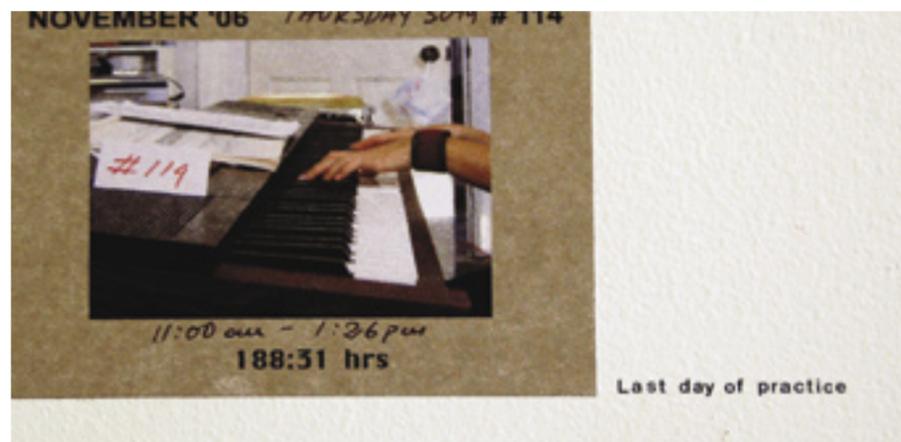
To this end, Kotretsos started taking piano lessons on July 12th. Without any previous musical training, she set out to play Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata, the quintessential piece that represents the peek of that period and tradition. The work is entitled *Approximately 188 hours* – the amount of time spent practicing the piano between July 12 and November 30, 2006. The performance not only reflects her dedication to the process of practicing, but also a dexterity that would allow her hands to perform what her eyes read, and hence a physical transformation.

The front gallery is filled with research material, drawing studies, video footage of artists and groups of people dismantling pianos, and a silent video recording of her hands performing the Moonlight Sonata. In the main gallery the *10 Fingers 88 Teeth* series of works on paper embody the concept of the show. At the back of the gallery the piece entitled *Approximately 188 hours* consists of a Yamaha Disklavier player piano that allowed Kotretsos to record her performance on the instrument's

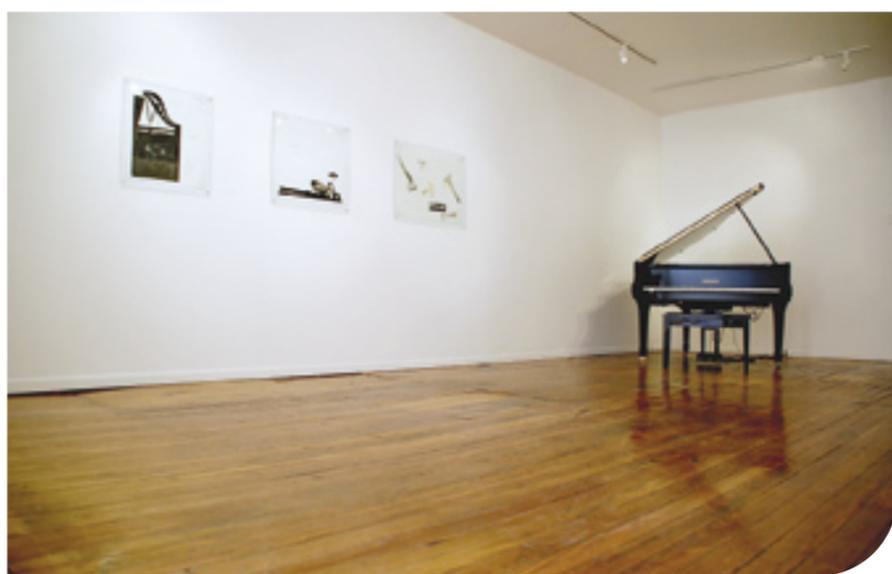
digital memory, which it then played back on its actual keys as originally recorded. When the piece was completed, it seemed as if the roles were reversed. Instead of having a broken piano, it was evident that there was a "broken" performer, who struggled immensely to complete the third movement.

Mrs. More – Scriptures on the Modern System of Female Education is a visual documentation of *Approximately 188 hours*. It appears as documentation of the process and a decision to share it with the audience in all of its tedious hours. The title is a reference to Hannah More's *Scriptures on the Modern System of Female Education* and "tells of a person of great eminence who calculated the amount of time spent by a girl in piano practice in one instance." By meticulously calculating the hours spent practicing, she also addresses the gendered tradition of musical education, in this case, her own.

10 Fingers 88 Teeth marked the culmination of the first International Artist in Residence program at Boots. Although she only spent six weeks working on the project in the city that fostered a rich musical tradition, Kotretsos spent months preparing. Complimentary to the goals of any residency, the work brings an incredibly fresh perspective to a decidedly familiar object – familiar not just to St. Louis-natives, but also to the history of art and its followers. **BP**



Mrs. More - Scriptures on the Modern System of Female Education | Detail of wall piece



10 Fingers 88 Teeth | drawing series and Approximately 188 Hours | sound installation | 2006

Special thanks go to my piano teacher, Foffi Rousou for her patience and support; Spiros Nakas Music House for providing me with a piano in Athens; Mary McGovern for lending me the keyboards in St. Louis; Bill Christman and Joe's cafe for offering me a piano and the space to practice during the residency; the Piano Service Specialist from Yamaha Corp. of America, David Durben for his support and assistance; the Coordinator of Yamaha Artist Services Inc., James Steeber for his support and time; Charlotte Dalton from the Piano Distributors for her cooperation; Sotirios Bahtsetzis for his support and input; and finally Patricia Daus, Ryan Hess, Andy Hagene, John McGuire, Mike McKinley, and the partners of Boots for their time and generosity.



Whoop Dee Doo – Beating Dead Horses

by Jamie Warren with an introduction by Jon Peck

Boots Contemporary Art Space is proud to bring together a collection of young artists working on the very forefront of exciting and energizing contemporary art, curated by Jon Peck and Jaime Warren. This exhibition is the third of its kind. It began first in June of '06 in Miami Florida, and was then sent back to Kansas City in October. In Miami, the show was slightly more traditional with works hanging on walls and some displayed on pedestals, but when it returned to Kansas City, curator Jaimie Warren dropped all pleasantries and created what can only be described as an entirely new way of presenting art to a large audience. The gallery was used as a stage and the artworks articulated the set. Throughout the night people of all ages were entertained by performances and spectacles that varied dramatically but were tied together by their high levels of energy and seemingly wholesome and innocent spirit. What will happen in this third installment remains to be seen, but what can be assured is a good time, outstanding work, and a show that will reinvigorate your faith in youth and art.

"Whoop Dee Doo" is a visual take on the frequently pondered, yet relatively undefined "second city" aesthetic. This style or genre reflects the social patterns that often emerge among artists living and working in a small-town environment. Shaped by its geographical and demographic particularities, characteristics such as fluid (rather than binary) notions of work and play distinguish their ideas and attitudes from those of artists residing in larger, metropolitan cities. In the case of this exhibition, the question at hand is how the small-city artist handles the presented challenges within their set of cultural manners or lack thereof.

In art history, a tradition has been established to look first to the alleged "hubs" of the arts and entertainment industries for the most currently fashionable and contemporary. New input regarding the up-and-coming is constant, perpetuating the nearly impossible task of always staying a step ahead of the game. Under these circumstances, underground culture is rendered cliché before it has a chance to realize its own birth. Or worse, the underground is, ironically, co-opted by mainstream media at its initial introduction period. Over time, the cycle of these trivial phenomena becomes a complete and utter turn-off. Violence, gore, fashion and sex have been stretched every which way in contemporary art and culture, and in many senses have arguably been pushed to their absolute creative limit.

One question that relentlessly perplexes the young creative mind, in both social and artistic contexts, is the true meaning of the contemporary "punk"—in action, attitude and end product. It is a push-and-pull theory, constantly blocked or questioned by the whiplash presumptions of what is seen as punk, un-punk, punk because it is punk, punk because it isn't punk, punk because it used to be punk, and punk because it is punk and then considered un-punk, therefore punk again. "Punk" is no longer linked to mohawks and moshing and violence and flouting of rules and formalities, as those traits have become more and more associated as mere fashion statements.

A positive outcome has spawned from these paper-thin borders between the hip and un-hip, predominately by those either exhausted or bored with the ever-fluctuating battle. What now seems more interesting and appropriate in contemporary times is to simply acknowledge the presence of those who have acquired a wholesome understanding of the world—as a bunch of bumbling and blind and imperfect humans. Perhaps it is a trait of a recent generation to understand that maturity is based on respect and true understanding of others' strengths and weaknesses.

This understanding can manifest itself in various forms and take on more humorous and interesting traits. From a social standpoint, there seems to be less interest in violence and fashion, and more in subtlety and risks. These risks are not for social status points, but are rather risks taken in the construction and perception of their own social identity. They risk embarrassment and humiliation for the sake of their own and others' enjoyment. They prefer acting like ego-free children as opposed to under-privileged, enraged adults wallowing in their irritation and remorse for contemporary mainstream society. They prefer doing pyramids and playing childish pranks at a party to looking good and getting laid. They prefer oddly constructed and awkward costumes to wearing the latest trends; ideally for the humor or confusion it brings to themselves and others, as sometimes the best ideas are intended to be viewed as having absolutely no valuable or reasonable motive. But most importantly, they are the last to judge others who are honestly enjoying themselves, regardless of their appearance or "image." The common ground shared is the weird, yet joint understanding of the dorkiness all around us. Though we are all guilty of judgment in one form or another, and this may be more of a goal than an actual reality, it is a definite growing force that has earned its own acknowledgement.

These ideas run parallel to a new breed of smaller-city work that is less reliant on shock value, more focused on subtlety, honesty, and pure, unadulterated humor. The perspective is a richly layered and intelligent response to the challenges brought to the middle-American artist, lending itself to a new way of viewing contemporary culture, which these artists are challenging themselves to comprehend and execute contextually in their work. "Cool Jerk" explores these boundaries by gently skimming the aforementioned thin line that rests between awkward, funny, silly, fashionable, confusing, hip, ugly, misinformed and/or ridiculous.

These objectives also tend to manifest themselves within a social context. The small-city artist is truly immersed in a "community"—as opposed to working a "scene"—which has as many advantages as drawbacks. One strives to fully realize the true origin of stereotypes and labels when immersed in a more static or conservative population, as these labels are then much more firmly enriched. Once realized, the baggage of pigeonholing can be filtered out and broken down into its true meaning, then appropriated and critiqued in a constructive and stimulating manner.

A certain new power and self-awareness is formed when an individual is identifying these challenges and utilizing these concepts to their advantage, therefore aiding the fruition of the creativity of both their own work and that of their community. A smaller town has the complex task of filling a niche, forced by the lack of new content and entertainment constantly floating through and saturating their environment. Young people aiding this growth learn the hard way that they are responsible for their own happiness or unhappiness, and have a choice whether to wallow in their misfortunes and pack up and head for different terrain, or foot the bill and carry the weight on their own shoulders. Simultaneously, the big fish / small pond dilemma weighs on one's mind heavily. All these notions force tight bonds and are the driving force behind more grass roots, d.i.y. efforts. Many smaller art communities are slowly building a name for themselves through their unique approaches and communal exertions. Their artists tend to be unbiased and open, drawing bridges between different styles and palates rather than segregating them in a battle to keep subcultures "pure." The final bond that is woven throughout these communities is their unsurpassed work ethic and struggle, which focuses not upon what there is to have, but what there is to create. **BP**



Untitled | drawing by Cody Critchloe | 2005



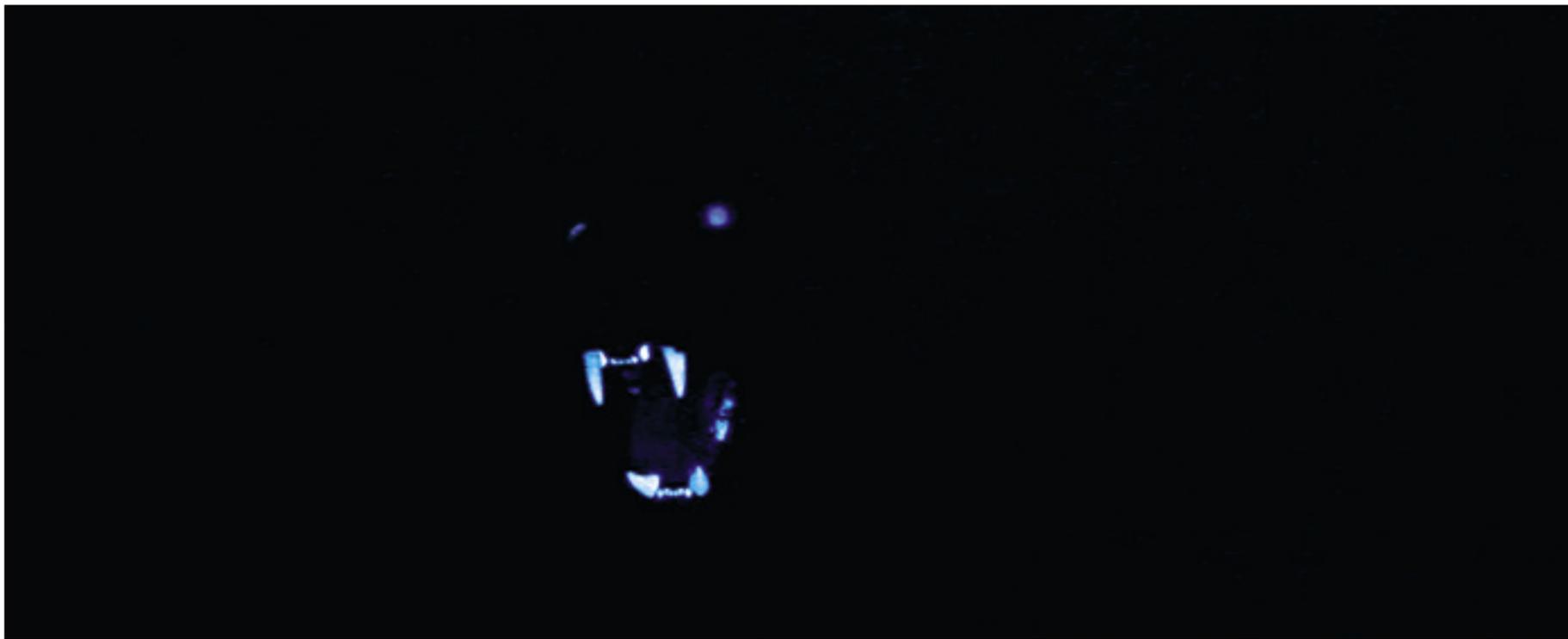
Whoop Dee Doo | Rocket Projects | Miami, FL USA 2006



Zombie Feminist Rap Video | Leone Anne Reeves | 2005 (video still)

Miguel Calderón

interview by Juan William Chávez



Los pasos del enemigo | 2006 | Video transferred to DVD | 5:39 | Courtesy of the artist and kurimanzutto, México

Miguel Calderón is a Mexican artist and one of the founders of La Panadería, a small, artist-run exhibition space in Mexico City. From 1994 to 2002, they rocked out locally, and gained the attention of the International art scene. La Panadería served, in part, as the inspiration for Boots Contemporary Art Space, in St. Louis. Juan William Chávez interviewed Miguel Calderón via email.

Juan William Chávez Could you please tell me about the first time you walked into La Panadería. What did you “see” in terms of potential and vision?

Miguel Calderón First of all, the concept of La Panadería didn't start off as a space but instead as a group of young artists doing things which really didn't fit in at the time in Mexico City. So, basically what we did was show our art experiments, and then throw these big parties at a friend's house. Our philosophy was to avoid kissing people's ass at all cost, and just do our thing freely. Then came the space, an old bakery that was lent to us, and we found out that a great Jewish bread maker had been shot there. It was a huge building and we took all three floors, including the roof; we showed in it, lived in it and even played music in it. When we decided to remodel it, we kept the bottom floor and left this huge oven as an homage to what it used to be, as well as keeping the name “La Panadería” which means “Bakery”. It was amazing to have a meeting point, as well as a space, in which we could do anything we pleased.

J.W.C. Did you expect La Panadería would have the effect it did on the international art scene, Mexican contemporary art, and your personal studio practice?

M.C. Not exactly, but I have always known that sticking to your ideals can take you really far. We just did what we needed to do, more out of necessity than to have an impact. And now, even the last Whitney Biennial reminded me of what used to happen in La Panadería, only in an academic way. Having done La Panadería was only part of this learning process, which helped me to understand that with will, you can confront and accomplish anything you want.

J.W.C. What are the three key ingredients that make an artist-run space successful? What were those ingredients for La Panadería?

M.C.

- 1 *No ass kissing; doing things your own way, not the established or institutionalized way.*
- 2 *The capability to raise funds by either selling beers, getting grants, or throwing parties in order for the space to live.*
- 3 *Conviction and a lot of time and patience.*

J.W.C. Punk music has a great history with artists and artist-run-spaces. What role did punk music play in La Panadería?

M.C. I basically started playing all my old records right after the openings, and people who were tired of suit-and-tie/wine-and-cheese type of openings, stayed until late. The point of La Panadería was not only to have shows but a place to have a social life outside of all the uptight, techno type of shit happening at the time. I also had a punk rock-band—Mazinger Z and then Intestino Grueso—and we started occasionally playing there and eventually having other bands play. People from the art world and the underground music scene started hanging out as well as a whole bunch of really young neighbors, and this created a good mix. I could see how a lot of people got inspired and started breaking the rules, like we did.

J.W.C. Starting up an artist-run space has been one of the steps artists often take into the contemporary art world (artist-run space, commercial gallery, and then to the museum). How did you navigate through this process and how did it affect your work?

M.C. It affected me in that I always had pure freedom making art, with no rules; and when I started showing as a young kid in NY, the rules changed. Discovering how the art market worked was quite a shock to me, but also a good learning experience. The thing is, as long as I can do what I please I am happy, so it doesn't matter artist-run space, gallery, or museum as long as it is you who sets the rules.

J.W.C. Most artist-run spaces have a life span. They start; they have exhibitions; and

then they're done. What did you walk away with from your experience in La Panadería?

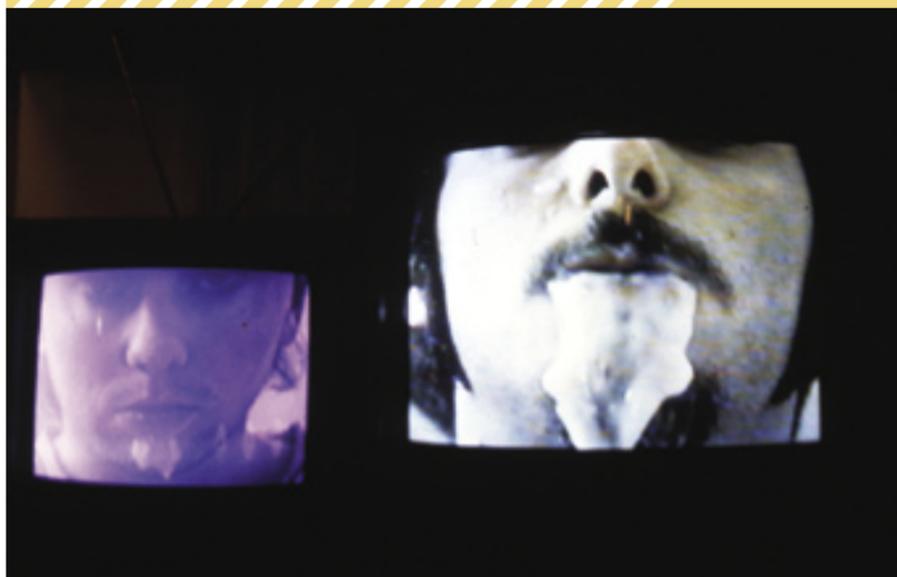
M.C. There was a point when important known curators started getting involved, and it seemed to me that the same things that institutions were doing were beginning to happen at La Panadería. That was the day I decided to say goodbye and just stick to my own work. To me, there was no point in doing the same stuff big museums were doing. I liked it as an artist-run space, not a curator-run space. Then the La Panadería died, but not the philosophy.

J.W.C. What would you say to young artists who might want to start an art space of their own?

M.C. Focus on making art. If you have extra time and have no place to show, you can ask someone to lend you his or her garage. If it works for you, there you have the beginning of an independent space. After a few shows you can start asking for grants and inviting artists you like.

J.W.C. I would like to invite you to show one of your videos at the Boots Contemporary Art Space. Would you consider showing in St. Louis?

M.C. I have never been to St. Louis, is it fun there? **BP**



Hogar dulce Hogar | 1995 | Video collaboration with Rodrigo Aldana | Curated by Rodrigo Aldana



Ridiculum Vitae | 1998 | La Panadería, Mexico City

Kling and Bang

interview by Tim Ridlen



photo: Erling T.V. Klingenberg

The group Gelitin in front of Kling & Bang gallery before the happening *Hugris* takes place inside. The group came riding down the main shopping street in Reykjavik to their opening of their show. July, 2006



photo: Erling T.V. Klingenberg

Photograph of the artist Sirra Sigrun Sigurdardottir playing the Potato Woman in the film *Skipholt*, a collaboration between John Bock and Kling & Bang gallery. The 60 minute film was shot in Iceland and beside the artist, Icelandic artists acted in it and produced it. May, 2005

Just below the Arctic Circle, the island nation of Iceland stands isolated halfway between two continents. In the capital city, eight artists are working to bridge the gap, at least for other artists. Since 2003, the Kling and Bang gallery has been working in collaboration with artists from Europe and North America to realize collaborative projects in the culturally thriving city of Reykjavik. Through email, I spoke with Erling T.V. Klingenberg, a founding member:

Tim Ridlen I'd like to start off by getting to know a little more about your operation. How did the eight initial artists come to work together? How did you find a space to operate in and how do you keep it going?

Erling T.V. Klingenberg In the beginning of the year 2003, I moved back from Copenhagen, Denmark to Iceland. In Copenhagen, I had carried the idea of starting a gallery for a while, but the energy of my fellow artists there was not as I wanted to be. Shortly after I came back to Iceland, I got offered this space on the second floor as a studio space, where the gallery started (it has been in the whole house since 2004). Because of its location (right on the main shopping street in Reykjavik) my old idea of a gallery came back alive. There was also a big need for a gallery that allowed and offered young emerging artists to exhibit. After I made this decision, I called various friends that I had come to know through different situations and different periods in my life. Many of them did not know each other, and furthermore, many of them had studied in different countries and had dif-

ferent experiences. After one or two meetings, we fixed the place and the first opening was in May 2003. It quickly got a lot of attention, and in late fall of the same year the National Bank of Iceland contacted us and offered us a 5000 square-meter, old factory house to run as a studio space for artists. The 5000 square meters were soon transformed into a thriving maze of artistic activity. Some 140 artists, designers, filmmakers and musicians worked in the building on a day-to-day basis. The large, complex building housed art studios, rehearsal rooms, a gallery, performance spaces, recording studios and construction workshops. KlinK and BanK was also open to visiting projects of all kinds including theatre performances, concerts, installations, and seminars. Many of these visiting artists have also used the space for the development and production of new works, including large-scale pieces such as the Sheep Plug Project by Jason Rhoades and Paul McCarthy, which was made in collaboration with resident artists, which was exhibited at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. The last large project (May 2005) was in close collaboration with Christoph Schlingensief (a world premiere) in the making of the project *Animatograph – House of Obsession – Iceland Edition*. For two years KlinK & BanK became a center point for Reykjavik's artistic life. There was also intense public interest – fed by a packed program of open events. There were over 40 local and international touring concerts (including Peaches, Fennesz, Poni, Trabant, Sigur Ros), 31 exhibitions, 15 premieres in theatre and dance, and regular open days for the public. A rough average of three events per week! International

interest in KlinK & BanK was thriving, fueled by several documentaries about its development that have been broadcast abroad and published. Unfortunately the Kling and Bang gallery lost the space that hosted the artists' base, KlinK and BanK, late in the year 2005 due to the National Bank of Iceland selling it to a contractor.

Kling and Bang gallery continues on the main shopping street as it always has, and sometimes does projects abroad under the artists' base name KlinK and BanK (NOTE, the whole time we kept the two venues separate and in different buildings; Kling and Bang gallery on Laugavegur 23 - the main shopping street and KlinK and BanK – artists' base was further up the same street).

Kling and Bang gallery gets a little funding from Reykjavik city and the government, but is otherwise funded by the eight artists running it. Larger projects are funded and sponsored separately by private or official funding. The collaborating artists also donate works to the gallery and we can sometimes sell those works to keep on financing the gallery, by taking a percentage of the works we sell from exhibitions. The gallery as of today is also highly dependant on the volunteering work of us running it. But we hopefully can change that to some extent in the near future.

T.R. The amazing aspect of the gallery, I find, is the collaborative projects between the resident artists and those that come from all over the world. Has this aspect of the project

changed your way of working as an artist? Also, how do you think that changes the way international artists are exchanging dialogue?

E.T.V.K. The collaborations we've done have inspired us on many different levels. It has been great to see in action how different artists think and work. It has always been an exchange of ideas. They listen to us and use some of our ideas, and we do the same. That has been great for all of us since we all work as artists as well. So, it has had its advantages over other galleries that get "ready-made" art works to exhibit that we actually participate in the creation of the works/projects. I think in some cases, artists do exchange dialogue and collaborate on works, even if they are from a different country, but I don't really know of anybody doing it in such a direct way like we have done (do you?). I mean, I've taken part in international art shows with artists from all over the world, but most of the time, or always, it's more like you show up and do your thing. Of course the society and the country inspire you, but you still do your thing, right?

But I also think that the artists we've worked with are open-minded towards that kind of collaboration and have done it on a different level before elsewhere - for example, Gelitin, Jason Rhoades and Paul McCarthy, John Bock, David Askevold, and Christoph Schlingensief. That fact should also be considered.

T.R. Is there something about Iceland, or Reykjavik in particular, that makes a space like Kling and Bang so successful?

continued on page 11



photo: Goddur

Detail of Hekla Dogg Jonsdottir's installation/sculpture *Fireworks for LA* at Kling & Bang gallery. Constellation with light sculpture and video projection. Structure made from sound reacting cold cathode lights and hot-glue. The lights are triggered by the sound of prerecorded fireworks, causing the sculpture to react similar to real fireworks, while a (Ken Burns Effect) screen-saver with floating pictures of blooming fireworks is being projected on the opposite wall. July, 2005



photo: Erling T. V. Kingenberg

View of the installation *Sheep Plug* at Kling & Bang gallery, a collaboration between Kling & Bang gallery, Jason Rhoades, and Paul McCarthy. June, 2004.

continued from page 10

E.T.V.K. Iceland still has some sort of exotic aura or rather exotic appeal to foreigners (tourists), and, of course, it comes to use on many different levels. There is one thing regarding working on projects, large and small, in terms of getting things done: the small population. If you need something done, there is always somebody who knows somebody who can do it. And furthermore, it is often on, perhaps, a more personal level and with more open-minded reactions towards artistic projects than in countries with larger populations. The mentality and approach towards getting things done is maybe the well-known sentence; "Thetta reddast" (can't really be translated but means sort of, "Don't worry, it will happen"). On the contrary, understanding projects and places like Kling and Bang gallery has been lacking from officials and politicians, but it is improving (we hope).

I think that the success of Kling and Bang is more the volunteering work provided by us and others running the gallery, as well as the attitude described above. We don't, or try not to, limit ourselves or the artists' projects in terms of what is possible and what is not possible. We avoid words like "no we can't do that," and I think that has made our reputation on the international (as well as national) level so good. The artists we worked with talk highly about their experience of working with us and the word gets spread.

So far we have mostly done larger projects or collaborations with foreign artists but we are willing to do so with national artists too. There

are two reasons for that (and maybe more). First, it is very difficult to get funding for projects for Icelandic artists if the project is going to be realized in Iceland. It is easier if it is exported, and easier if it is imported (a foreign artist doing a project in Iceland). Second, it is also complex to work hard for a close (in terms of nationality) fellow artist on a project in Iceland where everybody is competing about a small piece of the cake. But with the artists' base, KlinK and BanK, we proved that's a bit wrong, because it was very hard work - all done for building up studios, and a project environment for fellow artists (and musicians, theater, designers etc.). So today, we are willing to create a better situation for Icelandic artists; and "bleed" for them, too. In short, I think that the success of Kling and Bang gallery is the strong belief we have in the projects and the artists we work with. And perhaps the fact that the commercial thought comes last (maybe that is one of the reasons we are kind of poor).

T.R. How might you characterize Iceland art and artists. Is there an "Iceland aesthetic"?

E.T.V.K. Icelandic art has quite a short history, and furthermore, it is an unwritten history. I know there are two scholars "competing" these days/months on writing Icelandic Art History, but so far it has mostly been written via catalogues, announcements and critics in newspapers. Your question is one of the main topics in discussions in Iceland today. The "old masters" were painting landscapes and sculpting sculptures built on folklore and myth, so it has been kind of on our backs throughout

the years - folklore and nature. It is very difficult to find Icelandic movies and music videos that don't show the landscape somewhere in it, and the way officials (politicians and "cultural embassies") present Icelandic art in foreign countries, the pure landscape is never far away. It controls the selection of artists; and what is more dangerous, it might control what the artists make.

But nevertheless, I think the state of art being made today by younger artists is more global, even though somewhere deep down you might find something that shows where the artist is from. Perhaps it is more the fact, and the myth, that Icelanders are wild, barbaric, full of energy, and drink a lot that follows Icelandic artists, especially when they are abroad. So, it's no wonder the officials select artists that are safer to show.

I think we are kind of looking for an Icelandic aesthetic that is maybe there, and maybe not. Perhaps it is more sublime, like in the works of Olafur Eliason, an international exotic idea of Iceland. Perhaps, the conclusion is that the foreign eye tells us more about what an Icelandic aesthetic is than we know, or are aware of.

T.R. What projects do you have planned for the future? Can we expect to see the return of a space similar to the KlinK and BanK artists' base?

E.T.V.K. When KlinK and BanK faced the fact of losing the house, we had the idea of going on tour around Europe in buses and

vans with music and visual art. We called the tour "Gypsy train", and the idea was to travel between cities and countries; do shows and gigs and invite everybody to join (and drop out of) the train. We haven't done that yet, but it has kind of started in terms of having done things abroad under the name KlinK and BanK, even though we don't have a base anymore in Iceland. It also comes back to the lack of understanding from the officials of what the base was really doing for Icelandic art and society. We have been kind of laid back, taking time to think things over but hopefully we will come back stronger. So in the end, I can't really answer if KlinK and BanK will return. I'm pretty sure it will in some form because it had such a strong effect on everybody working there (140-200 people). The general goals of Kling and Bang are kind of being reviewed these days, but meanwhile we just keep on going. We have some ideas of focusing more on the production side of projects, offering artists collaborations to see exhibitions/projects realized. We have some ideas also to go more commercial, but keep our initial focus and goals clear: to assist artists to realize their ideas in the best way possible and present them.

The future is bright, and lots of projects are yet to come and to be realized. **BP**

A conversation with Fatos Üstek

interview by Isil Egrikavuk

Last summer, I ran into Fatoş Üstek at a cafe in Istanbul. We had known each other for a long time but somehow lost contact. As we spoke about what we were doing, she mentioned an alternative gallery space, which she was involved with at the time. I visited PiST/// (which means dance floor in Turkish) the week after and talked to its coordinators, Didem Ozbek and Osman Bozkurt. It was very exciting to see the space and what they were doing. They were not only showing work, but also organizing discussions with artists, curators, and other non-mainstream spaces and organizations. Later, I became part of their exhibition series "Reserved." The whole process of being involved in PiST/// felt more like a collaboration, which I found appealing. The text below is a conversation between Fatoş Üstek and myself via email.

Isil Egrikavuk Fatoş, I would like to start this dialogue with a question that will require an informative answer more than anything. How visible are alternative spaces in Turkey's art scene?

Fatoş Üstek I have been thinking of how to start with your question. I would like to include alternative acts, events, and happenings into the "alternative space" category in Turkey. What is "alternative" is broadly defined in the Turkish art scene as the non-mainstream. What is non-mainstream is that which manifests itself through the realization of events at those spaces or at spontaneously transformed common places. There has been a rapid movement in new places in the recent years. Turkey does not have a long history of contemporary art. What is being thought in art academies and private art schools is more on the level of classical training through established media; thus exhibitions of Impressionist paintings and sculptures have been mainly occupying the venues. If I could shortly mention the history, contemporary artists were mainly living or exhibiting abroad at those times.

There was a rush of togetherness in the 90s, which brought many artists together who shared the urge of producing together, thinking together, sharing together, acting together. Hence, the 90s was the time of having large-scale group shows, and a variety of groupings on various art production levels. The 90s not only led artists to enlarge the awareness of art production by other artists, but also enabled the realization of events, and exhibitions together. In the aftermath, the time of individual acts and individual participation replaced openness. Currently, the Turkish art scene functions through the questioning of forms of togetherness and active ways of participating in society. This can be one of the main reasons for the opening of new collectives and art spaces as well as the realization of art events. Istiklal Street, as the main center of events, is not the only place where art events take place. There is a large group of artists (approximately 250 members) who are realizing public events and exhibitions in Kadikoy, on the Asian side of Istanbul. There is an artist-run space in the form of a shop on the street in Tunnel, called Bas, which supports the production of artist books; and PiST/// in Pangalti realizing events and exhibitions. So, the spread of venues has also led society to come across contemporary art. Speaking in minor terms, in the locality where the space is functioning, we can talk about the visibility of these spaces; however on a major scale the lack of support of the media fragments information on those spaces. Therefore, the visibility is mostly on the scale of the neighborhood and passers-by, as well as among the art scene.

I.E. You mention PiST///, an alternative space, located in quite a marginalized area in Istanbul. As far as I know, you have been involved in the curatorial and organizational practices of PiST/// since its opening this year. One thing that is quite interesting about PiST/// is that it is not only functioning as an exhibition space, but also a catalyst for a dialogue among other artist run/alternative spaces. Rather than being

a closed box, PiST/// seems to be functioning as an open platform, where artists, administrators, curators get together and discuss. From my experience talking to artists, it occurs to me that artist-run spaces are facing so many more financial difficulties that discussions center more around defining the problems, rather than creating constructive solutions. How do you think this unification structure could function better?

F.Ü. Yes, I have been involved in the founding and opening of PiST/// Interdisciplinary Project Space. The lack of city or state funding kind of defines the state of alternative spaces and also the artists who have the need to sustain their production. Private funding is a slippery condition; also, since one could become a product they would like to put in the market, instead of being able to realize one's own agenda. Hence many spaces prefer to have funding without interacting with the sponsor. Mostly they end up not finding one, or finding a temporary one who could end the agreement any time.

I.E. Now, the audience outside of Turkey is familiar with the names of several Turkish artists, such as Kutlug Ataman, Huseyin Caglayan or Esra Ersen, since they are not only significant figures, but also they are represented outside of Turkey through galleries, museums, and biennials. I would like to ask you what you think about the contribution of alternative spaces to the recognition and representation of young Turkish artists, both in the national and international art scene? In other words, is an alternative gallery enough of a criteria for international recognition?

F.Ü. Definitely. There is a need to open up exhibition possibilities for young artists and curators as well as a need to support continuing production. And this pool in the coming future will play an important role in the international scene, by its very nature.

The question of recognition for alternative spaces within the international scene has actually many answers. For instance, Sparwasser

ducing? Or will it only satisfy the desire to be marginal?

F.Ü. This is a really good question. Besides all the naïve positions on alternative spaces and despite the best intentions for realizing events, opening up dialogue, and discussing and experiencing and changing—there is an art market—not only biennials and large-scale exhibitions but also galleries, collectors, dealers, which all have a big influence on art making. It would be super naïve to recall the days of "Art = High Level of Social Reform," but could it be proper to focus on a local scale, to define the dynamics of your art production, and to be open to renewal or change the dynamics: to interact or to choose not to interact... I would rather propose to have the definition of "alternative" in relation to a static means of understanding. And we should not forget that every, single collaboration is destined to repeat the structures they have been against at first. That is to say, their presence can take the form of institutions that have already established a path with the hierarchical positioning of every element that is included, which would be the problem of those formations in the long run. So, I think it is very important for a collective or a group or an alternative space to define their norms of independence, where they stand, their aims and the meaning of those aims, their expectations, their attitudes, and their means of getting a hold of their art production. Today, I don't see a defined path for becoming a "star," a well-known artist or a well-known space. It comes down to relationships, connections, but not at a very high level. What you produce is much more important, at least in my naïve approach.

I.E. We can question how we look at the alternative, or what we consider alternative to be. Is every artist-run space alternative? Is alternativeness comparable with the means of administration, or the quality of work that is shown, or the positioning of the space within the art market? Perhaps all of them together are a quality of marginality...

And what about the artists? I think what you are saying in terms of having definition is also applicable to them. Knowing how your work can be perceived according to its site or compared to the politics of the site is quite important and influential on the mode of production. I feel like we have thrown the ball to the spaces so far. What about the role of the artist in this cycle?

F.Ü. I feel uneasy to use the term marginal... It is one of the most depicted, challenged, and consumed words... But I think you use the term in reference to the unfamiliar. Until now we have mostly talked about structures and the best form to be attained—and you are right to ask about the role of the artists. Spaces, in general, without strong artistic practices could not be as strong as we have made them out to be. And of course, every artist-run space is not alternative from their first moment, or the title does not give them the function of being alternative. Is it possible to not care about the art market, and the celebrities, and the mainstream, and the major scale? Will that uncaring attitude define the art practice as alternative? Maybe yes maybe no; and also, art practice totally surrounded by the dynamics of the art market can be alternative. Hence, there is not a formula of defining the scales of alternativeness.

Every form of understanding has a tendency of categorization, especially today where our spheres of movement have been charted, defined, and mapped; thus, there is an effective attitude of concretely defining geographies, dynamics of art production, artistic realms. And of course this attitude positions the artist and the production, the perceptions. Hereby I will not give a list of what the role of the artists could be, since that would be falsifying myself, and I try to avoid straight schedules. At least, I could state that I think it is important for the artist to be aware of her/his production and the means of its position and possible outcomes, interpretations, and strength. **BP**



I would like to add, supporting an art event is also very unclear for the sponsors, not only because there is less space in the media for art events, but also because of the insecurity of what the benefits will be. Thus, many events that are not connected to institutions come to be realized by individual initiation; either you spend your income on your project, or find a small budget for a temporary period. Funding is a necessary fact for every event, so the duality of finding money and structuring projects creates hesitation and tiredness. I agree that finding constructive, concrete solutions is necessary for the improvement of projects content-wise. But the limited number of sources leads to either focusing on funding and imagining the best possible projects, or realizing the project on a smaller scale with the resources you have. The unifying structure could function better if there were a pool of funds open to anyone who would like to realize a project. That pool should be initiated by private companies who agree to give a portion of their taxes. This would also require the confirmation from the State and support from the media in all terms. So that, for instance, for five years the pool will be open to anyone who would like to apply for a budget, without a selection process. I believe that good and bad projects alike have to have the same opportunity to be realized, that this will empower the project initiators, and the public to go through a process of coming across various events, and lead to an understanding of what the stake of art could be.

HQ in Berlin, and Para-Site in Hong Kong are independent alternative spaces that are known worldwide... Also, in the last years independent collectives have been invited to biennials, large-scale shows, etc.... Alternative spaces with a strong standing point are needed for art production. These spaces do not only function as an experimentation platform, but also as a political positioning. Specifically for Turkey, the coming biennial, which will be curated by Hou Hanru will open up the possibility of international recognition for artist-run spaces.

I would like to add that the dynamics of internationalization can differ according to the geography, the events taking place, the international curiosity focused on that specific place, and the events themselves.

I.E. Fatos, so far we've considered the positive aspects of alternative spaces and their contribution to the Art world: representation of the marginal or the unheard, the inclusion of new artists... On one hand, there is great interest in unifying towards these goals, but on the other hand, achieving these things will not be as naïve and revolutionary as it sounds.

Let's be more specific here. What do we want from an alternative gallery? Collaborations, getting rid of rigid administrative structures, new names, new artworks... The list goes on and on. Do you think this will really increase the quality or the mode of thinking and pro-

SubCity Projects

by Candida Alvarez

SUBCITY PROJECTS officially opened in April of 2004 and closed on May of 2005. I want to publicly thank all the artists who I had the pleasure to work with. I invited them to take a risk and they did with enthusiasm and grace. I am deeply indebted to all the artists who gave up the time to participate and make this a memorable project without monetary compensation.

There is so much talent and potential in this city. I was thrilled to contribute in such a small way. The following artists presented their projects:

Steve Cordero

Text by Terence J. Hannum

Revisited, Lifted, Elevated

April 17- May 8, 2004

**Dianna Frid and Mark Gallyay
in collaboration with
Rebecca Ringquest**

Text by Thea Goodman

Carriage

September 10- October 1, 2004

Sumakshi Singh

Absence and Extension

October 13-31, 2004

Anna Joelsdottir

Text by Michelle Grabner

25 Sticks

November 5- November 30, 2004

Rael Jero Salley

Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds

January 7- January 29, 2005

Tania Bruguera

Caida Libre

February 11- February 27, 2005

Saya Woolfalk

Trousseaux: Love Object

March 4- March 27, 2005

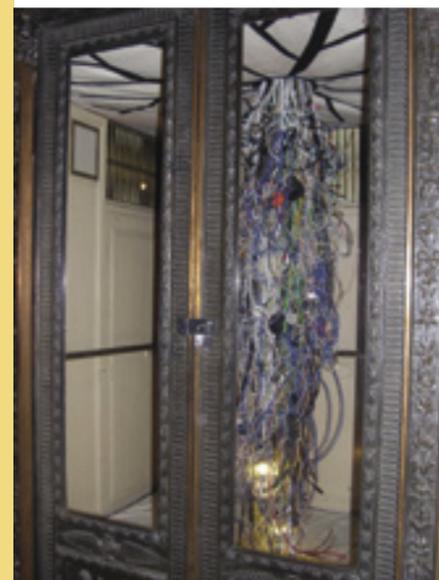
Kim Mitseff and Amy Vogel

Over-the-Top Love

April 22- May 29, 2005



Sumakshi Sing



Dianna Frid / Mark Gallyay



Kim Mitseff and Amy Vogel

Since 1898, the Fine Arts Building, located on Michigan Avenue in Chicago, and its vintage hand run brass elevators have lifted and escorted a huge community of visual, literary, architectural, performing artists and their visitors up to their respective studios and offices. For over one hundred years this "art colony" has existed in downtown Chicago, three blocks south of the Art Institute of Chicago. It was a secret to me until I rented a studio there several years ago. I was enchanted with the idea that my often silent studio practice could and would be punctuated with the giggles of young ballet students, tenor and soprano voices, piano, drum, cello and violin lessons, alongside the mighty sounds of a rehearsing junior orchestra, the bustle of Michigan avenue, the CTA trains and more. Today, the Fine Arts building is still home to performance spaces, exhibition spaces, artist studios and offices for musicians, writers, architects, a Kundalini Yoga studio and a cafe.

Although born and raised in New York, I came to Chicago seven years ago via New Haven, CT (where I acquired my MFA degree from the Yale School of Art) to teach at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I am a practicing visual artist with over 30 years in the field and I am currently a tenured professor in the department of Painting and Drawing. Finding a studio here in Chicago was not difficult; keeping it was the challenge. The Harrington School of Design was vacating the Fine Arts Building and there were plenty of spaces to lease. I was on a wait list for several years, and this was a rare opportunity to leave my Hyde Park basement studio, which was creating moisture havoc on my paintings. I have had several studios in the last seven years, but my favorite so far is in the Fine Arts Building. Being downtown has its perks, but also at night it can become a ghost town.

My need for community and conversation really fueled my search for a project/exhibition space within the building. I wanted to share a passion for art and practice that could live outside the working studio; I wanted to cre-

ate an "underground downtown scene" that was a "subcity" outside of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Museum of Contemporary Art on Michigan Avenue; I wanted to provide my students with an opportunity to walk south and have an excuse to walk into this cultural and historical legacy that was right next to the Utrecht art store that they are more familiar with on Michigan Avenue; and I wanted the opportunity to mix things up ethnically and conceptually.

The idea for the elevator came out of a conversation with the former owner, Tom Graham. I was looking for a small "underground" space that was self-contained with a window that one could peer into. I needed it to be easy and inexpensive. The idea was that it could exist independently outside of me. I was not going for the traditional white cube model with an attendant. I wanted to organize and curate. Tom told me about this elevator he was using for storage and asked me if I was interested. I immediately said yes! I just wanted to be the catalyst, the spark that ignited the projects. Emerging and established artists were asked to submit proposals that would be challenging responses to a public site that simultaneously dealt with the idea of containment. SubCity Projects probed the notion of site as an incubator for creativity. For me, as an artist relating to another artist, it was a relationship that was founded on trust. It was a humble space in an ordinary place. Somewhat out of the way, invisible because it was like everything else around it. It was not about selling art, but about sharing ideas on the creative process. For the artists whose proposals I accepted, I hoped they would walk that edge between experimentation and failure. The elevator carriage was a difficult space. It was compact and there were restrictions. For example, you could not use the space outside the elevator shaft, the doors had to be padlocked closed and there was no painting of the walls or floor.

It was important that the Fine Arts Building was a public space. Elevator operators control the flow of traffic. The ground floor stairwell

is inaccessible from the first floor. The idea of an elevator as a site, as an alternative space, and as an architectural capsule was intriguing to me. The elevator is the core of this building. In this little capsule you are contained. You have to verbally communicate your floor; otherwise you don't stop there. It creates community whether you want it or not.

The fact that elevator number four was out of service for over fifty years intrigued me. When the padlocked doors were opened to me for the first time, there was this dusty smell that covered old files, records, and furniture. The glass windows were blacked out. It was locked into position on the eighth floor with a cable for added security wrapped around a beam on the ceiling. Tom Graham had his electrician add two electrical outlets and a single light fixture. Because I wanted to maintain the history of the space, I did not have the walls or floors painted. I cleaned up and scraped the glass windows free of the black paint that covered them.

The independent artist project space was named after a song by Tracy Chapman. It not only pointed to the community within the building but also the world outside on Michigan Avenue and around the corner on Wabash. From my windows, I could see all the homeless people walking at night and in the early morning looking for a place to sleep, or outside in the west part of the building digging through the dumpsters for food. I think art is only interesting if you can be open to the world outside of yourself. Life gives you an edge to respond to. You can be invisible to what is outside and pretend to shield yourself. But in my mind, the world extends you and forms you. It gives you experience. The elevator was almost invisible. It is a part of the architecture of the building. You just bump into it. You won't find it if you are looking for the traditional gallery space. I added a text component in order to open up the dialogue with a wider range of people, to keep the conversation about practice alive, and to show how it can go past traditional cut and paste models. **BP**

White Flag Projects

interview by Georgia Kotretsos

As soon as I arrived in St. Louis in October I heard about White Flag Projects. Upon visiting, what I saw was an impressive, ambitious solo operation. A 2000-square-foot exhibition space of endless potential and great attention to detail that certainly renewed my conceptions of what a non-profit alternative space could be. This high-end, slick looking setting commanded my attention right away. The impetus behind the space is the artist, Matt Strauss. During my three-month stay in St. Louis, I attended a project and an exhibition opening reception at White Flag Projects. Many hours, plenty of care, and hundreds of thousands of dollars have been invested by this artist into art in St. Louis and that cannot be ignored. I was definitely interested in finding more about the space and the artist so I contacted Matt for an in person interview. The interview took place at the reading room of White Flag Projects in November 2006.

Georgia Kotretsos Matt, how did you get into the arts? Had you always looked at art?

Matt Strauss I had always looked at art. I had a long, long standing interest in art from my childhood and having been exposed to a lot of it through my mother. I just kind of had this epiphany where I had just finished my undergraduate work and I was preparing to go get my MFA for creative writing and it occurred to me at some point that all of my ideas were ideas for pictures. They weren't ideas for narratives, they weren't ideas for stories, and all of my stories were excuses to articulate these pictures. I was able to recognize in my own writing that my character development was always way behind where my prose was, and I just decided to cut out the middleman and just make the pictures directly.

G.K. Have you ever had a memorable art experience? I'm not talking necessarily about contemporary art. I mean something that you have either seen in St. Louis, within the United States, or abroad...

M.S. I can't think of the first time... I can think of several occasions where it's occurred though. I remember being struck dumb at some point by what Roxy Paine was doing with his automatic painting machines, and his automatic sculpture machines. Not necessarily by the fact of the automation, but by the fact that everything was so automatically beautiful. And that resonated very much with me because of what I was thinking about in terms of automatic beauty, and where certain art strategies can never go wrong, and the safety of that, and maybe the trap of that.

Francis Bacon's work always resonates with me; whenever I'm confronted with it always strikes me as a holy shit moment...

G.K. I like that

M.S. Yeah. (laughter) It puts you in your place constantly. I just found myself face to face with an incredible Philip Guston painting in a private collection that I had never seen anything—maybe in a museum I had seen something approaching it—it was something about the context of this incredible Guston, early abstract Guston, that was so striking. And you know it was in this room with incredible early De Kooning and Giacometti. And it didn't occur to me until I left that I had almost ignored the Giacometti and the De Kooning I had gone to see for this Guston that just took me out of—and Guston's not even someone that I care that deeply about. It was just that good of a painting that it shocks you into a new coherence and appreciation for the guy's work.

G.K. Stole the show

M.S. Yeah, that's not easy to do with me because I'm a big De Kooning kid.

G.K. Tell me a little bit about St. Louis. What is it to you, on a personal and professional level?

M.S. St. Louis is a foil. St. Louis is something you work against.

G.K. What do you mean by that?

M.S. I mean... In my personal mythology of my own existence, St. Louis is the evil God that I fight and try to beat. (laughter) Because you know, there is a great—and it's better right now than it's ever been—there's this wonderful core of very creative, very serious art people that are very concerned with con-

M.S. Well it is better than it's ever been.

G.K. What makes it better than it's ever been?

M.S. Well the diversity, and some younger people getting some power. If you go back ten years, or twelve years, there were basically two art galleries of any meaning. There was Greenberg Van Doren, which rarely if ever touched anyone that wasn't coming straight from New York. They were showing Donald Sultan and Susan Rothenberg, and those kinds of people. You had Elliot Smith Contemporary Art that was dominating, and you were either with Elliot or you were not doing very well. And there were people that have grown into bigger things. William Shearburn was largely a print dealer up on a little walk up thing that was maybe 400 square feet or something, and he's now got a very good gallery here. But uh,

And the reason there was nothing in that space is because what had been there, which was the Forum for Contemporary Art twenty years ago, has grown into the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, which is now a really big fancy building and a group of people in charge over there that have quite international agendas. And it really changed, from a place where local and regional artists that had outgrown the possibilities of commercial galleries could exercise their ability, to what it is now. The Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts has opened, which is this fantastic billionaire's playground of just spectacular things over and over and over again. The St. Louis Art Museum has kind of shifted in a weird way, a good way, maybe. Well, its shifted because there was a show, a series there, by and large it's a very staid museum, but the *Currents* series they have there, which is now in its hundredth-odd incarnation, but it used to have quite a few young



temporary means of expressing things, but it's like 600 people at the very most. Now that being said, it's a great living city. Things are not expensive, things are easily reached... I grew up here and I determined that I'm going to stay here. And it's always been this balance in my mind between the things I make—when I was thinking purely in terms of a working artist, my logic was always that I can make the things I want to make here with all the space in the world, things that are inexpensive, and a big enough studio. I had enough resources to meet all the technical demands of what I was making. I could do that, or I could move to Brooklyn—or I guess what would be Jersey City or Queens now, but back then it was Brooklyn—and live in a little 4 or 5 hundred square-foot studio and make little things that I'm not interested in and change my ideas to fit my circumstances. Between the question of playing the lottery and going to a bigger city and taking a shot at being relevant, versus staying in the middle of nowhere and trying to make it better for yourself and the people around you, I chose the latter, but I don't think I ever confused the idea of relevance with the idea of viability. I think you can make viable, good art anywhere, you just can't make meaningful art anywhere because meaning is assigned by the apparatus, and if you are outside of that apparatus, someone could make brilliant work and it's not going to matter because you know it's not going to have the stamp of...whatever.

G.K. Yeah, but you said early on that it's better than it's ever been.

I think what's happened, you know Elliot has retired, Greenberg has turned into a satellite of the New York gallery and no longer has any original programming, I don't think, I think its just things they get second hand from the New York gallery. But if you look at it now, Cherokee Street has happened in the last five years, which is where Fort Gondo started which is now four or five different things, where Boots is now, which is really important. And so that alternative art scene is kind of working for the first time in any kind of sustainable way. There are more commercial galleries here now because once Elliot was gone, William Shearburn became much bigger. Bruno David, who was the director there, opened his own. Phil Slain who had been around opened his gallery. Ellen Curly opened her gallery.

G.K. Talk to me a little bit about the role the St. Louis museums have played.

M.S. Well I was working my way up the hierarchy, actually. I was starting down at the entry level and I was working my way up (chuckle).

G.K. Also, I've come to realize the only space between a gallery and a museum is White Flag Projects.

M.S. Right, well I was working my way up to White Flag being here. White Flag, you know is very experimental and may not have any lasting power because of things I'll get to, but White Flag fulfills an incredibly important gap, I think, because there was really nothing in that space.

promising local things, and I think its down to like one a year. The last three have been Tara Donovan, and Julie Mehretu, and big rock stars like that. At one point there was, I think, more of a local, regional focus on that, which has been supplanted by what the Contemporary does now, which is the *Great Rivers Biennial*. That is, three artists get a fair-sized grant and exhibition at that museum. Plus for the local scene, that there's that possibility every couple of years, and to me that's healthy. I forgot to mention Laumeier Sculpture Park which uh, we should go back and put back in there at that high level because they just did have that Tobias Putrih show, and I mean real rock'n'roll New York fun, in the middle of a park in the county. I mean, a fair number of galleries, good alternative spaces... and I'm forgetting because I haven't been there yet, the new Kemper Art Museum, which is supposed to be fantastic. Wash. U. finally getting some new digs, and putting their absolutely spectacular collection in a different, more modern facility, that I am ashamed not to have been to yet, but uh I hear its just fantastic.

G.K. It's a great space. Fantastic indeed.

M.S. Yeah I heard it's fantastic, I gotta get over there.

G.K. It opened with Tom Friedman's show.

M.S. And Tom Friedman is kind of our local-boy-done good.

continued on page 15

G.K. As an outsider when you visit St. Louis, you have maybe three to four, maybe even five days of solid art viewing, and this is good art viewing.

M.S. Yeah.

G.K. Well, I'm happy to hear that.

M.S. Well, no, St. Louis you could have, any art person, I mean just based on the Pulitzer, and the new Kemper, and the Contemporary, and SLAM, Laumeier, and all the other things trickling down you could absolutely entertain yourself here for three or four days, no question about it.

G.K. Well, now, let's talk about White Flag Projects. Could you please tell me a little bit about this neighborhood—the Grove neighborhood, am I right?

dio in, and I was going to have just a nice white room in the front where I could take single paintings out of the studio...

G.K. For documentation, or?

M.S. Just to look at, because, ok and this is absolutely accurate. I had a fantasy.

G.K. Good! I want to hear all about your fantasy now.

M.S. The fantasy was that I was going to stop exhibiting my art. I was going to be a monk. Not a real monk, but I was going to behave...

G.K. Art monk?

M.S. like an art monk. And I was going to make my paintings, not read the art magazines anymore, not go out and look at exhibits as

"I would do it this way, or this way, and why are they not doing this?" And I saw an opportunity to try to do it the way I wanted to do it. And I also saw the potential to either do the generous community minded thing, or do the selfish thing that would be the opposite, with the same space. I just opted to try the nice way first, and if it all goes to hell I can still go back to my white room idea...

You know lots of things have failed here. Lots of things have not failed necessarily, but changed, have conceded so much to their environment that they've lost all semblance of what they started off as. My idea was, conduct an experiment where you open as nice a physical space as you're able to, with no commercial interest at all, just purely art for art's sake. Do everything to the highest level, don't do crappy shows, do hard shows.

three days, and much more based in the interactive or performance or video, that have no expectation that after the initial performance element that there would be any attendance to see the documentation or anything.

G.K. And the six exhibitions?

M.S. Those are five weeks each. And initially, they were six weeks, but to get the project stuff in, we deleted a week off of each one. Also, the plan was, I wasn't going to sit here July and August by myself.

G.K. When did you open exactly, when did White Flag open.

M.S. The first show was just in September of this year. It's that new. The in-depth scheduling started in February or March.

G.K. What is St. Louis' initial reaction to the space? How's it read?

M.S. Well, part of the strategy was to keep it very, very secret, as far as what I was planning to do. So when we announced it, it was very close to the opening, and it just kind of came out of nowhere. We sent out a very cheesy, kind of, anonymous card that just had a photograph of the space, and it didn't say really anything about it. It had the words "alternative art gallery," or something, in St. Louis. So, you knew when you got it that it was in St. Louis, you knew it was an art gallery, but you didn't know the address, you didn't know really anything else about it. And that went out... and I think—it was very neat, because it's such a small town that everyone knows everything instantly, in a way. I think within three weeks there's not a single art-related thing that won't have made the rounds. So I think the idea that this was kept secret in excess of a year and then just dropped out of the air so suddenly, I think that was a nice surprise that those things could happen here. And the reaction has been very positive, so far.

G.K. Let me ask you something about White Flag Projects here, as an artist who will take five to ten minutes to look at your site—and I might be living in St. Louis, Chicago, LA, or I might even be living in Greece: how can I use White Flag Projects? How can White Flags be something for all these artists who are interested in the space and what you've started here?

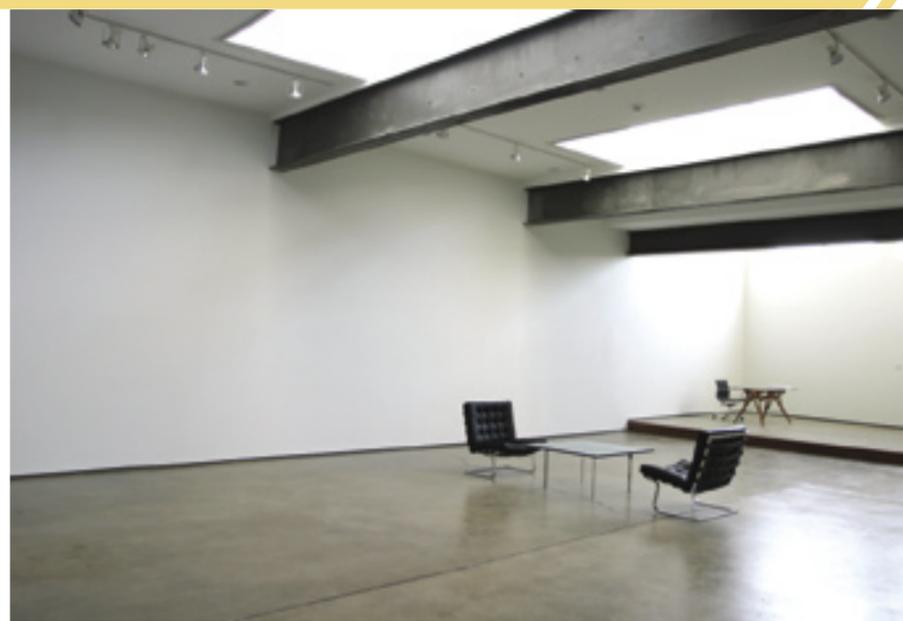
M.S. Well, I mean, if you're an artist I would hope that you would submit some of your materials.

G.K. OK, this is how it works?

M.S. Yeah, oh yeah, and one of the guiding principles here, and there's quite a few of them, is that you cannot have a good gallery if you just look around town. There's just not enough truly interesting art being made here to sustain as many things as there are here. So we're going to do a local show each year—really I like the idea of doing at least one local show. And that is what we have up now. I think there's enough to do that, but not a whole lot more than that. All of our programming is going to come from where it comes from. We're doing shows from LA, and Kansas City, and Washington DC.

G.K. Are you curating shows?

M.S. I'm doing quite a few of them, but we're also trying to get quite a bit of independent curation here because frankly the art that I care to curate and organize would not be enough to do a year of gallery shows. And it's not about the Matt Strauss show at White Flag, I really do want other people's ideas here. I really do want this to be a kind of hub here where a lot of different things can happen. And to that



Artist/Director Matt Strauss

M.S. Yeah, that's what it's called now.

G.K. Were you looking for a building in this neighborhood, or...

M.S. No, no, no. I was looking for a building. And not for a gallery either, I was looking for a studio. See I had outgrown my—I had been working in the same 1890s horse stable for... I mean, literally it was a horse stable, it was built in 1893. I had been working out there, I think it was seven or eight hundred square feet, for ten years, which is quite a bit; but my work is large canvasses and I just ran out of space, so I started going around looking for studio buildings. So, when you wonder about this location with no art things anywhere near it, it didn't seem that important when I was looking for a studio. And I looked at quite a few, but architecturally this building had qualities that other ones did not. The building was in terrible shape, but what I recognized immediately was that you get rid of all these partitions, and this is a six thousand square foot open footprint that you can do anything you want in. That was the reason to buy this building, and the fact that it was near all the highways...

G.K. But, how did you go from looking for a studio to a "six-thousand square-foot space?"

M.S. No, that's too big, that's too big for my studio. I was looking for three thousand, I thought, maybe four thousand if I wanted to have a lot of storage space. Because in my mind, "This is it. This is it, I'm going to buy this building and I'll never have another studio. I'm never going to move again. I'm going to do all these things now and then I'm set. I can be an old man here."

G.K. When did White Flag come into play?

M.S. I remember at one point I decided on this building, and it's too big to just have a stu-

dio in, and I was going to have just a nice white room in the front where I could take single paintings out of the studio... much anymore, and just see what years and years of isolated meditation would produce. Because even when you have no market and no potential you still have this career and market pressures that is bullshit, which I thought were affecting me on some preconscious, or subconscious level. You know, I was so aggravated by art world things that I thought this was...

The only thing I will miss in this fantasy, the only thing I get out of exhibitions, is the satisfaction of seeing the work in a nice, refined, white space. Or a nice, refined gallery. Because, in my studio it looks completely different. So then that was the next progression. Then as I started looking at the building more, and thinking about it more, I thought, "yeah that would be a terrible thing to do."

G.K. To yourself? As an artist?

M.S. No, no, no, to build a nice white room-

G.K. Only for yourself?

M.S. Just for myself, it's like a very greedy-

G.K. Oh good, I'm glad you just said that, yes, thanks.

M.S. -a very greedy thing to do, and as I saw the potential for how nice it could really be, I was like wow, I could do quite a bit with this space. That would be an awful thing to do.

And then, I got the *Great Rivers* grant, so that meant the whole idea of not exhibiting was out the window because the best exhibition I was ever going to get in this town had just popped into my lap...

Let me try and explain this: if you're not happy with everything going on around you, you know, or everyone I think says to themselves,

G.K. What does that mean?

M.S. Well I'll tell you exactly what it means. In my mind, I don't mean like, crappy art versus hard art. It's expensive to bring shows from other places. It's expensive to go to LA to find six young people instead of going to Chicago—it's expensive to do this, it's hard to do this, it takes a lot of logistics. It's expensive and hard to do eleven shows a year, in ten months, rather than to doing three shows a year, or four shows a year. So you know all those things are what I call easy; doing a big show every four months or every three months is kind of easy.

G.K. But it's better than doing ten bad shows in a year.

M.S. But what if you could do both?

G.K. Well, seeing bad shows was the best education I ever got. I've learned more from the bad art I've seen, than the good art.

M.S. Always, Always. That's always true, absolutely.

But, no, my idea was, why can't these be more stimulating. I mean some of those bad ideas, I think produce good experiences, but it's bad for the gallery. The idea for the project series here, the way we decided to do that with these two or three-day exhibitions that go on in between the big exhibitions. Initially I was very naïve about it. I thought that would be a chance to do the other end of it, and give these younger less evolved things a real chance to experiment in a great space. And you know, anyone that wants to go see it could technically go see it in a three-day period. In town. So there's no need for it to be up for five or six weeks.

G.K. So how many shows have you planned?

M.S. Four projects and six exhibitions, so ten shows.

G.K. Ten shows, with the projects in between.

M.S. The projects are the little in between things, that are just one day, or two days, or

point, at least three off the top of my head, four—well, our group show of young artists from Los Angeles is being curated by someone else, we have a group of Kansas City art being curated by, well I'm doing the curation for that but its an exchange show and they're sending a curator here to do the show there. We had a weekend of interactive and performance art that was curated by someone else. We're going to have a juried show at the end of the year that's not, its restricted to MFA and BFA candidates, but I will not be on that jury. That will be picked by other people.

G.K. I read in the Riverfront Times an interview that you gave to Malcolm Gay that you haven't touched your artwork for over a year now.

M.S. Well that was kind of misquoted or mis-spoken. What I had said was, well he asked me that in August. And I said, "I had not touched anything this year," which had been true. I finished the show for the museum and that was just about it.

G.K. So was there a period of time that you did not do any work because of the space.

M.S. Yes.

G.K. Do you have artists' guilt? Let me ask you that, because all artists-

M.S. Because I'm not getting my own work done?

G.K. Yeah.

M.S. Not as much as other people because what I'm doing with the time I should be painting—I find a lot of value in the experiment, and I'm enjoying being the scientist in the experiment. So there's some of that, but uh, I actually just last week got the studio ready to paint again. I've got the show here in May.

G.K. Where is the show?

M.S. At Bruno David Gallery. And that being said, I'm going to be showing very different work, and very playful work, but I really want... I think about it all the time, I think about what I want to make and what I'm going for, I think about colors, and I think about things I see, and I make little notes... but actually getting a chance to do it, its just such an absurd amount of work here, and its just me. I've got nothing. I've got some interns that I can't delegate anything to besides watching the front and stuff like that.

That's actually my big goal, is in two years if I've expanded the budget enough to have a deputy director that can take care of some of this awful day-to-day stuff and let me get back to my life a little bit. But that being said, my paintings were never popular anyway (laughter). It's true.

G.K. OK, Let me ask you one last question. Where do you see yourself as an artist and White Flag Projects five years from now?

M.S. Five Years from now... I'm not gonna answer that one. Five years from now? Hopefully I'm making art; hopefully White Flag is still here. Hopefully someone else is doing the majority of what I'm doing now, and I am in a largely oversight role just to keep it on track. Those are the hopeful things. I'm sure I'll be making things, I don't know of what quality. You know... I'll be forty—I'll be thirty-nine?

G.K. Hmmm.

M.S. When I look at five years, by five years White Flag will have gone away or it will be really something else, it won't be in between, I mean it won't be in flux—

G.K. What's your goal?

M.S. Well, I mean, the goal is to have a sustainable, supported, alternative exhibition space on the same kind of level as equivalent projects elsewhere. Something that has a group of people supporting it financially, something that has retained its original vision for facilitating both the most experimental things and the most refined things, which is what we—I mean if you look at just what's gone on here in three months, you have had a breadth of experiences. You've had the lowest—not the lowest, that's not the right word—You've had the things with the smallest audience possible, you know long term performances, and things like this that have a small number of people interested in them here, and you've had shows of just very pretty painting, by you know artists with a lot of currency in the real world, you had both of these things going on within a few days of each other, and ideally it's not become too much of one or too much of the other in five years. Ideally it's still doing the same things. And uh, just with more money and more people working here, and uh, and as far as my own art you know its uh, I, that's kind of like automatic, that's kind of like where do you see your breathing five years from now. I still plan to be breathing. That's kind of a corny metaphor, but I guess I'll use it. **BP**

Diversions and Detours in the Realm of Art Publishing

by Ian Morrison

Forty years ago art publishing was a vastly different landscape; periodicals were still stratified by their views about new art, while the "Artist Book" and the "Artist-Writer" was just beginning to take form. The mastodons of art criticism still loomed high, appearing to lay out the rules of the game. Last September's *Artforum* time-traveled back to that world, with Michael Fried and Mel Bochner taking center stage. Fried's article about Douglas Gordon testifies to his critical staying power despite the fact that his contemporary criticism today feels oddly out of place. Fried's adversary Donald Judd who peculiarly paved the way for a generation of artist-writers such as Smithson, Bochner and Graham has more of a contemporary legacy today. "The Domain of the Great Bear" over "Three American Painters," describes the general field of contemporary art publications.

The state of perpetual commentary that the art world has sustained for over two hundred years has grown exponentially. The first *NY Art Book Fair* this November marks a recent manifestation of such growth. The Fair seemed to run the gamut from secondary dealers enticing buyers with highly delectable publications such as *Aspen*, to small comic book publishers with a certain predilection for only the brightest of colors. Such fanfare rendered the traditional publications a drab and outmoded look. It also made the problem of art as pure communication seem ever more obvious and grotesque. Here, I want to lay out only the most apparent and difficult problems that art publishing faces, and then offer four publications that are at the leading edge of these difficulties.

Today, the writers in art publications are often multifaceted people. For where people have no choice over the means of expression, the artist-critic-curator has become a norm. Floating between these unified practices, the individual subject makes an art world in miniature, however, only in appearance. This *unfreedom* illuminates the difficult position of financial existence in the increasingly commercial Art World, and even the most successful artists occupy this position, with their coveted interdisciplinary practice.

Ever since the review has been divorced from the essay, reduced to five hundred words, it

has become more a tool of navigation than criticality. Anyone who sees the reviewer in a seat of power is sorely mistaken. Reviews, like a television shot of politicians sitting at a conference table, are images that mask the actual "behind closed doors" reality of the system. The "find art everywhere" button on artforum.com is more the philosophy, and the gossip columns, which so many major art magazines have given into online, gives the whole profession a tragic glaze.

In the sixties *Artforum* was said to be the Art World Bible, being the embodiment of the flight from Paris to New York. Today, however, it is better known by students as difficult to photocopy, impossible to read on the subway, and expensive to subscribe to; though its bible-like quality has not disappeared. *Artforum's* fall from grace, and the founding of *October* signals a problem of lasting importance. The ill-famed Lynda Benglis ad in the November 1974 issue of *Artforum*, which stratified the publication's staff, was such a situation. As *October* founding editor Annette Michelson described, the ad expressed that "the magazine itself is the brothel within which things are for sale."¹ But when *October* was founded and it cleansed itself of commercial interest, it found itself in a familiar trap. Though it stated in the first issue that intellectual journals such as the *Partisan Review*, *The New York Review of Books*, *Salmagundi* - are staffed or administered by that academy and, more importantly, articulate its limits and contradictions² - they seemed to know quite well what their fate was. No doubt, *October* published many of the greatest writings about art over the past thirty years in a way *Artforum* was capable of doing in the sixties. But in regards to academia, *Art Since 1900*, has become the very embodiment of academia, the starting place of the new Art History education. The much talked about split between being commercial or academic really doesn't get at the larger problem, though. A more subtle shift was occurring that wasn't a clash of egos or theoretical. For example, in the third volume of *October*, Robert Pincus-Witten reflecting on his editorship at *Artforum* described a second wave of post-minimalist artists who "make art of high quality" but in "absence of that early keyed-up buoyant sense of communal achievement."³ It is here that I think one begins to see

the problem was not merely about commercial interest, nor a clash of egos, but was structural and this had a profound effect.

Seth Siegelaub is a figure as vivid and familiar as Arthur Cravan. More comfortable as a book publisher than a gallery owner, Siegelaub was one of the major instigators of Conceptualism with a capital "C." Their mantra that what was traditionally secondary material was actually primary, struck the young artists as entirely correct. The quintessentially Siegelaub problem "to make someone else aware that an artist had done anything at all"⁴ still rings in the ear of the art entrepreneur. When conceptualism took minimalism's all encompassing control of the viewer that one step further, its anti-critical nature became apparent. At its most extreme, the artist Douglas Huebler said, "What I say is part of the artwork. I don't look to critics to say things about my work. I tell them what it's about."⁵ In the odd battle over the organization of the traditionally secondary material, the critic was characterized as obsolete, in contradiction to the nature of the new art, and I think also mistook to be an invisible hand. The anti-authoritarianism of the sixties and seventies certainly had its expression in figures like Siegelaub, but the theory was both correct and misplaced. This artistic extension into the publishing realm is no longer Conceptual; it has become now almost a basic tool, however reified.

At around the same time, the artist-interview, perhaps better linked to performance art, became a favored mode for expressing the art situation in writing. It appeared to give the adequate room the artist demanded, putting their work on equal playing ground with the interviewer. It had its own anti-critic ethos, in line with Huebler's statement, and had a great deal to do with the artist using publishing as a sight for artistic production. One of the greatest publications of this moment was *Avalanche* magazine edited by Willoughby Sharp & Liza Bear, who documented the alternative art scene in seventies SoHo mainly through interviews. The style had a fresh quality, and clearly gave voice to the artists perspective, enabling the possibility for a potential viewer to see new art from the perspective of its producer. There was certainly a kitschy quality to it, which was part of the appeal; potentially it made room

for a particular kind of critique. More accurately it's a form of research, and as Hans Ulrich Obrist has shown it is an extraordinary curatorial tool.⁶ Willoughby Sharp & Liza Bear were also pioneers of the early video art scene. They recorded video-interviews, but also produced works that centered around conceptualism's central fixations on communication, technology and the mass media.

The best English language publication to seriously take up the issues surrounding Video Art was *Radical Software*.⁷ No other publication has really taken the utopian aspects of early video art as seriously and comprehensively. *Radical Software* published works by visionaries like Buckminster Fuller and Gene Youngblood, contained technical information useful to the budding video artist, and spoke candidly about the possibilities of this new medium for artists and theorists alike. Most of these debates have been lost to history, topics rarely of interest to the art press, despite the fact that video is a much wider subject matter now, more technically feasible, and more global than it was in the seventies. At times, it seems that the art press is just far more interested in Sofia Coppola, the embodiment of Hollywood despotism, than any moving image work made in the Art World. There are plenty of magazines that discuss popular films and other feature releases, but the rapidly growing video art scene is often entirely overlooked, to the Art World's detriment.

In more recent times, *Afterall* co-published by Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London, and the School of Art at the California Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles, is a publication still committed to the essay form. It is a publication that provides the adequate space and breadth to actually write about art. It prints its adds at the end of the publication, it carefully works out topical continuity, and it allows multiple authors to espouse their thoughts about a particular artist or collective. It is at times, as critically engaging as *October*, but has a pulse on the contemporary art world in a way *October* no longer does. In the most recent issue, it admirably portrayed the Bernadette Corporation in all its distinct frustrating contradiction. Lane Relyea avoided the regular claptrap in the opening article, and avoided prais-

ing any and all things collective as automatically good. Relyea had no reservations about pointing out the obvious in regards to the collectives' position in the art market. That *Afterall* presents ambivalence and contradiction with ease sets it apart from the rest. That two art schools publish it should be no surprise. Art schools have become major progressive forces in restructuring the Art World over the last decade.

Bidoun Magazine is a regional magazine that is unlike any other, it doesn't seek cultural protectionism like other regional art magazines, and at times it even belies its proclaimed regionalism. The magazine reviews and reports from the Middle East, writing many unknown artists into existence, but also addresses the abstract concept of the Middle East with equal care, painting the full multifaceted complexity of the region. The artists covered by the magazine range from those born in or around the Middle East, to those who take up subject matter relating to the region. Each issue takes up new cultural topics, reorganizes its format, and weaves together politics and culture with superb design. In numerous ways *Bidoun* symbolizes what's best about the global nature of the Art World. In a time when the media can't help but eat up Orwellian fantasies, a single paragraph of this phenomenal publication can set a person straight.

Point d'Ironie, free and distributed on a level that only a patron like Agnes b. would be capable of, is a publication that presents a clear legacy from entrepreneurs like Siegelau who dreamed of a globally distributed format that offered nothing but blank space. An eight-page full color tabloid, printed on cheap paper, the publication is free to pick up at all sorts of art-inclined places. Though its entrepreneurial spirit is conceptual in nature, its pick of artists is entirely diverse. The vary cheapness of the material and the high quantity at which it is produced offers something unique to the world of artist publications. It makes for superb wrapping paper, a simple poster, or an engaging glance. The ephemeral quality makes it look outlandish under glass at MoMA, it looks more at home wildly pasted on the wall of a boutique or in a home.

Cabinet stands out intellectually as a joy to read. It mashes together the approach of the classic art writers, Foucauldian genealogy, and simply a relentless attempt for searching out new subject matter. The magazine takes its name from the sixth and seventeenth century cabinets of curiosities, drawing inspiration from a moment when objects were not yet categorized. The essays draw out the best qualities in the quirky approach of the artist-writer, juxtaposing carefully researched imagery, with well-

written essays. Out of fear of being gossipy or commercial, like so many other magazines, it lacks a certain aesthetic critique of contemporary artistic production, perhaps an unfair critique, but it should be noted. An "arts and culture" magazine does not necessarily contain art criticism, and I venture to say that's a problem.

What is lacking, and has been for quite some time, is an aesthetic approach that comes out of a multitude of recent practices. Few magazines offer art criticism, more contain reporting and art. Criticism has become almost an orphans' craft, at times it appears to be needed, if just to squelch the naive cultural relativism that the art market revels in. The obsessive hatred of Formalist critics (a term used by the adversaries of a group of critics, who can't really be accurately described as just formalist) has lost any and all connection to its original rupture, and has more to do with mammoth structural transformation that the Art World has experienced over the last thirty years. It is unacceptable to express that suddenly everyone's art is connected to the thoughts of Deleuze, Badiou or whomever - at the level these thinkers are often engaged it doesn't really matter. It is merely cultural capital to say that art supposedly relates to theories that are in vogue without really lending any credence to the assertion. Also, as a writer it is much more

challenging and profound to work from art. It is also a false assumption that artists know more about their art than those who experience it. It is also authoritarian. As Theodor Adorno wrote in the opening of his *Aesthetic Theory*: "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, nor its inner life, not its relationship to the world, not even its right to exist."⁸ Working not from the truths that art reveals, or proclaims, but from its untruth, it is at this point that the artist and critic can begin to talk about society. **BP**

1. For an oral history of Artforum See Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974* (New York: Soho Press, 2000).
2. "About October", *October*, Vol. 1 (Spring, 1976), 4.
3. Robert Pincus-Witten, "Naked Lunches", *October*, Vol. 3 (Spring, 1977), 101.
4. Seth Sigelaub, "On Exhibitions and the World at Large: A Conversation with Seth Sigelaub", *Studio International* (December, 1969).
5. Ibid
6. See Hans Ulrich Obrist, *HuO: Hans Ulrich Obrist: Interviews*, (Charta, 2003).
7. See www.radicalsoftware.org
8. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 1.

Democratizing the Art World, One Blog at A Time

by Megan McMillan



Lamp-laptop | photograph by Megan McMillan | 2005

It wasn't very long ago that when a panicky art student asked her professor how she was supposed to keep her finger on the pulse of the art world once she left school, there was only one right answer: subscribe to *ArtForum*, *Art in America*, or *ARTnews* and read it every month from cover to cover. That, or move to New York City. Take your pick.

Back in the mid-twentieth century, the world of art could be summed up in nice, neat monthly installments. The setting? New York. The players? Clement Greenberg, Peggy Guggenheim, Leo Castelli, Tom Wolfe, Rothko, Pollock, the Ab-Exers, the Minimalists, the Land Artists, the superstars of the white hot eighties art market. Anybody with a subscription could easily read the few publications that trafficked in their doings, and keep up with the relatively slow-footed pace of the world of 20th century art nearly in its entirety.

Here in the 21st century, the world of art is simply too complex to be summed up in a handful of monthly magazines. The whole globe is brimming over with artwork to see and discuss. There are vibrant art scenes in

almost every major metropolitan city in the United States and in most first-world countries. No one publication can master it all. No one critic can possibly see all the art of merit in this pluralistic age.

Fortunately, the rise of the global art community has happened in tandem with the spread of information by way of the Internet. Museums now support websites, many with images of their collections online. Individual artists have portfolio websites. Never before in the history of the world have so many people had such easy access to such a variety of art and culture.

None of these online vehicles, however, has had nearly the impact on the art world as the humble blog. In their infancy, most blogs were personal online diaries, and as a result were dismissed early on as potentially legitimate writing venues. Perhaps they would have stayed that way had it not been for the commitment and professionalism of writers who saw the blog as a potential voice that might reach a wider audience than any traditional media outlet could access.

These early bloggers knew that the way to reach that wider audience was to specialize, to professionalize, and to provide fresh content on a regular basis. It wasn't long before art critics like Tyler Green, a former arts writer for the *Bloomberg News*, threw their hat in the ring. He has now been publishing his art blog, *Modern Art Notes*, which *The Wall Street Journal* has called "the most influential of all visual-arts blogs," since 2001.

Artists, like the Los Angeles-based painters Kozy and Dan Kitchens, have taken up the challenge too, and begun to use blogs as everything from online sketchbooks, to diaries, to open studios, to a way of generating exposure. Museums, like the Contemporary Art Museum St Louis and the Walker in Minneapolis, have since joined the fray and begun publishing daily informal accounts of everything from exhi-

bition installations to fundraising events. Even the traditional art magazines have conceded to the new paradigm: *ArtForum Diary*, dubbed "GawkerForum" by competing art bloggers for its tabloid-like focus on the minutia of the lives of the rock stars of the art community, was listed by *Forbes Magazine* as one of the "Best of the Web" visual arts blogs.

In the same way that a plane ticket to New York is no longer the only means to see cutting edge contemporary art, a 5000 word article on an exhibition that closed a month ago, half a continent away, is not the only way to read about it. Citizens of the art "blogosphere" now have the enormous advantage of being able to keep tabs on what's happening in New York, Berlin, or in their own backyard. All for the easy price of an Internet connection. **BP**

Champs of the Art Blogosphere

Artists

Brief Epigrams
www.briefepigrams.blogspot.com

Dennis Hollingsworth
www.dennishollingsworth.us

Fette's Flog
www.the-flog.com

MTAA-RR
www.mtaa.net/mtaaRR/news

Carol's Bloggie
www.esart.com/blog/index.php

Autobiographical Hentai
<http://kozyndan.livejournal.com>

Normal Blog
www.nicknormal.com/normalblog

Alec Soth
www.alecsoth.com/blog

Collectors

James Wagner
www.jameswagner.com

Critics

Artopia
www.artsjournal.com/artopia

Modern Art Notes *
www.artsjournal.com/man

Artblog
www.fallonandrososof.blogspot.com

Galleries

Edward Winkleman
www.edwardwinkleman.blogspot.com

The OC Art Blog
www.theocartblog.typepad.com

art.blogging.la * *
<http://art.blogging.la>

Hankblog
www.hankblog.wordpress.com

Magazines

Artforum Diary
www.artforum.com/diary

Museums

Contemporary-Pulitzer
www.contemporary-pulitzer.blogspot.com

Smithsonian
www.eyelevel.si.edu/2006/02/in_artnets_pred.html

Katzen Arts Center
www.art_at_thekatzen.typepad.com/art_thekatzen

Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
www.modernblog.org

Nelson-Atkin
www.nelson-atkins.org/blog

Walker Art Center
<http://blogs.walkerart.org/index.wac>

* heavyweight champion of the world
* * runner-up for the title

Archiving the Future: The Media Burn Independent Video Archive

by Tim Ridlen

What has gone wrong with America is not a random visitation of fate. It is the result of forces that have assumed control of the American system... These forces are: militarism, monopoly, and the mass media... Mass media monopolies control people by their control of information... And who can deny that we are a nation addicted to television and the constant flow of media? And not a few of us are frustrated by this addiction. Now I ask you, my fellow Americans: Haven't you ever wanted to put your foot through your television screen?

- Doug Hall as President John F. Kennedy¹

I originally came across Media Burn in an effort to find a history that I knew existed in Chicago. This was a history I had only seen in images, but sought to find in the flesh. What I found in the end was an archive. The Media Burn Independent Video Archive was started by Tom Weinberg who also produced the video of the Ant Farm happening, *Media Burn* (1975), quoted at the beginning of this text. In spirit, it's hard to separate the event organized by the art and architecture collective, Ant Farm, and the web archive founded by Tom Weinberg. Although *Media Burn*, the event, occurred in San Francisco in 1975, and the Media Burn Independent Video Archive was officially launched from Chicago in 2006, both came with the promise to change fundamentally the experience of the moving image. In the generation between the two, the images of history became animate and the potential to fulfill the promise of video technology came within reach.

Chip Lord, Doug Michels, Curtis Schreier, and Uncle Buddie were the members of Ant Farm for the event in the parking lot of Cow Palace where a modified Cadillac was driven through a flaming wall of televisions. The intended message, as President John F. Kennedy (Doug Hall) articulates, was an expression of frustration with mass media in the form of television. Well before 1975, it was evident that artists, now able to work with video as an affordable

medium, were fed up with the failed potential of television. As quasi-radicals were attesting to the potential of expanded media, the power of corporate media was consolidating and fastening itself as a hegemonic entity. There is no doubt that the introduction of consumer-grade video cameras and videotape offered a completely new and radicalized medium, but the television and its broadcast remained the sole proprietors of a mass audience. Even after the introduction of cable television and public access, the next thirty years was a struggle to compete within the power structure of a broadcast mentality. As a member of the early video collective, TVTV, Weinberg was familiar with these struggles when he eventually found an outlet in the streaming video of the web. Although it seems like it was right there all along, the now ubiquitous technology made popular by Internet youth culture has only been practical for the last few years. Many of the projects produced originally for broadcast television have now found a home on the web, and Weinberg's collection of his own material makes up the majority of his Archive.

From 1989 to 1993, Weinberg co-produced with Joel Cohen a series called "the 90's" for cable television, which featured work from independent nonfiction videomakers all over the world. This is a particularly poignant part of the collection, perhaps, because of its close connection and uncanny resemblance to the present (the first Gulf War, the first President Bush). In addition, there are several tapes of raw footage from this series. It is in these raw tapes that you find the image, not the episode, of history. In addition to being able to watch old television shows, this allows anyone to create a new context for the images. Weinberg boasts that the archive is "unlike anything you've been able to do, except maybe in an editing room."² I would agree, and add, it is the ability to see unedited images from our past that renews the promise of video as a decentralized medium.

An archive, on the other hand, seems contrary to any idea of decentralization. Even the most

democratic archive still represents a consolidation of information. By referring to the image as both honorific and repressive in function, Allan Sekula has made the case for "a generalized, inclusive archive, a shadow archive that encompasses an entire social terrain while positioning individuals within that terrain."³ Giving privilege to the eye that looks—at the criminal mug shot or the family portrait—those that might look upon an image define its potential to enter into the archive. In the case that it is formalized through images, the archive finds its center, its consolidation of information, where the lens of the camera takes over the eye of the beholder; that which *could be seen* is that which could be archived.

The potential of an archive such as Media Burn, then, is in the power of appropriation. This does not have to amount to a literal appropriation of the images held in the archive, but rather an appropriation of its function. Through dispersion, access, and control, perhaps the archive could become a way to generate *new* meaning. The episode of the past can be recast as raw image. The technology of streaming video, which Media Burn has in a way pioneered, is new ground for the moving image.⁴ There are few websites with the duration and flexibility of Media Burn. Granted, it is not a free-for-all of moving images—there are other sites for that—but under certain terms, you can submit non-fiction videos to be held in the archive for free. So far, the site will mostly appeal to those in Chicago, or with an interest in Chicago's history; but with the potential for global contribution that niche can only expand. Without sounding overly zealous, I would like to say that now is the time to make good on the promise of video, if only through mass dissemination of an entirely different sort than that of broadcast television.

The categorical distinction lies in the laws that govern the digital world; most importantly, the impossibility of deterring digital copying.⁵ It is imperative to set new precedents for electronic video on the web, and Media Burn may or may

not be doing that, yet. It is still uncertain how the website will function, despite the intended outcome. A major challenge is not only funding the operation, but also the immense amount of storage required for streaming such large amounts of video.

Media Burn does not just exist on the web. The tapes, many of which are not yet available online, are housed in a storefront location on the northwest side of Chicago at 4270 W. Irving Park. Of course, if you visit, as I did, there isn't really a way to search the extensive amount of material. It is more to get a sense of the operation that one might visit Media Burn in person. There exist thousands of hours of video footage stacked tightly among towering shelves. Much of the initiative at Media Burn is to save the material, not only preserving the physical medium, that is, but also to put it into the next form so it can continue to be seen. It is with this sentiment in mind that I stand by my observation: it is not the current form of the archive that will redefine our awareness of the world and its image, but rather how it is used in the time to come. **BP**

1. Doug Hall, perf. Media Burn, prod. Ant Farm, executive prod. Tom Weinberg, VHS, Video Data Bank, 1975.
2. Tom Weinberg, Incendiary Videos from the Media Burn Archive, Chicago Filmmaker's, Chicago, 29 Oct. 2006.
3. Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989) 348.
4. In an email correspondence, Weinberg said, "The template for a streaming video website we developed in conjunction with Enomaly Inc. in Toronto, has enormous potential for other producers, colleges, and global communities who do politically alternative video by the thousands. We have started that application process."
5. Bruce Schneier, "The Futility of Digital Copy Prevention," *Crypto-Gram Newsletter*, 15 May 2001, 30 Nov. 2006, www.schneier.com/crypto-gram-0105.html#3

Stalking the Continuum

by Adelheid Mers

finding Flusser

Gerlinde gave me the small pamphlet, the Benteli edition of "*Krise der Linearität*"; she had received it from Ursula, who had met Flusser in Marseille, but was now over him, at least in terms of her thinking about New Media. On the last train home across town, the number one, I was able to read the entire thing. The next day I raided both König and Müller, filled my big-wheeled suitcase and took it all back to Chicago. He had been dead for years.

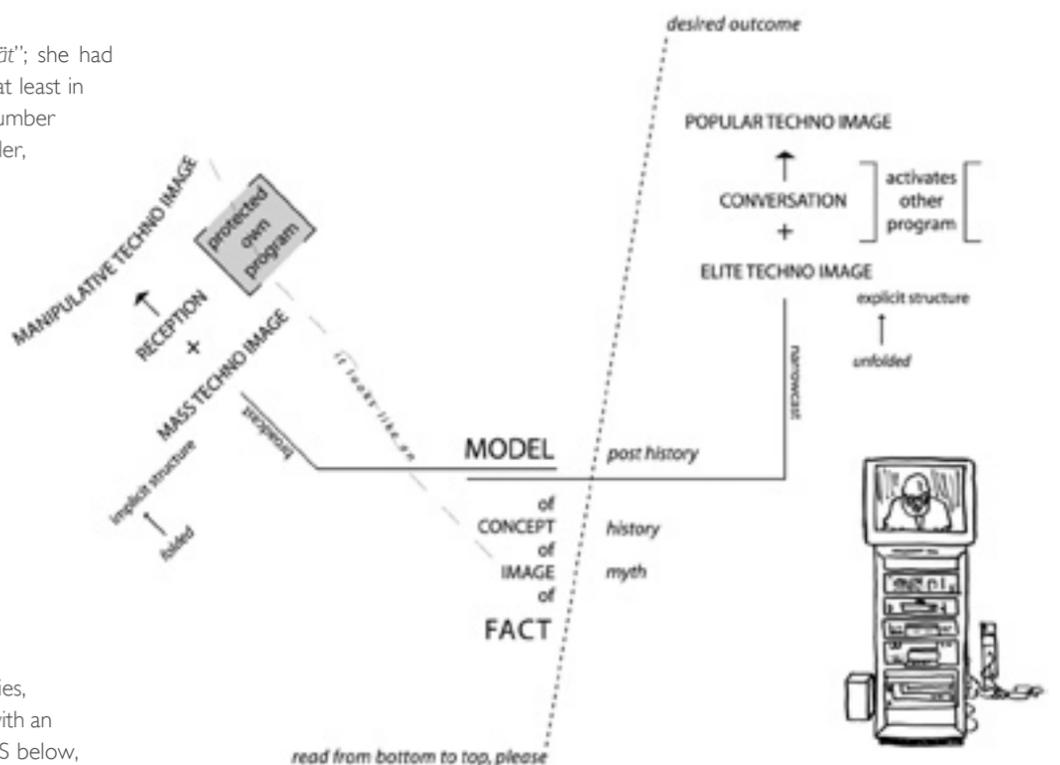
Some of the German titles are: "*Kommunikologie*", "*Medienkultur*", "*Nachgeschichte*", "*Bodenlos*", "*Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*", "*Die Geschichte des Teufels*", "*Die Schrift*", and "*Vampyroteuthis infernalis*". (Silvia loaned me a copy of the out-of-print "*Gesten*" when I returned the following year and visited the archive). There are also many texts in Portuguese, and some in French. The Flusser Archive's office is a small room on the first floor of the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne (the archive is about to move to Berlin, I have heard). The setting feels medieval, windows open both onto the street and into the driveway that cuts through the front building and connects to the courtyard; this would be a fine spot for the castle's guardian. With my digital camera I shoot typewritten pages (no line breaks) from the manuscripts, lined up in shelved binders. I find the word "textolatry", as I thought I might. Flusser's own library is housed upstairs. There's a copy of a book dear to me since the seventies, Whorf's "*Language, Thought, Reality*". Like Mary Poppins, Silvia climbs onto a desk with an umbrella, reaching to close a transom. On a TV set on a rolling cart, DVD and VHS below, I watch a video, Flusser talks. Comfortably seated across from me, he is a cyborg now.

reading Flusser

"Towards a Philosophy of Photography", "The Shape of Things", "Writings", "The Freedom of the Migrant", are editions that are available in English. In Europe, Flusser became well known with "Towards a Philosophy of Photography". I gather that his work is still mostly discussed in the context of media studies. Three of my favorite essays are "Celebrating", "Exile and Creativity" and "Line and Surface" (all can be found in "Writings"). In "Celebrating", he develops the idea of an 'other program' (as opposed to an 'own program') that can be read as a plea for open-source

software. That's a nice, frothy peak the essay whips up, but I prefer to read it through a different lens. What if the notion of the 'other program' leads to a critical survey of the reader's very own premises, in preparation for a mutual exploration of contingencies that have programmed not software, but individuals? How do I make sense, and what prompts me to do it just so? Celebration comes into play when ossified (implicit) structure is discerned and brought back to life (made explicit and thus again pliable), when a new capacity for absurdity

continued on page 19



supersedes habits and truths. "Exile and Creativity" describes how to be uprooted forces one to approach the above, and how an embrace of permanent migranhood (the witnessing of structure) promotes conditions of creativity (the teasing of structure). What are the means available to perform and to express these operations? They are image and text. In "Line and Surface", Flusser assesses how they are intertwined. At all times, humans attend to facts. Initially, images mediate. As the notion rises that images are man-made, linear texts are invented to explain the images (iconoclasm). As the notion rises that texts are man-made, techno-images are summoned to model the texts (textoclasm), that have earlier served to explain the images and still contain their traces.

In "Kommunikologie" (not available in English), Flusser offers something that I take to bolster my art practice: diagramming, or "conducting surveys of premises." Again, an important distinction between implicit and explicit structure is performed: Flusser expands the term "technical image"—an image that models a text—into "mass-techno image" (implicit structure) and "elite techno-image" (explicit structure). The elite techno-image is what I wish to claim, but first I'd like to set up the more complicated mass techno-image. Mass techno-images are created when an operator uses a code or an apparatus to produce images. (For example, a photographer uses a camera, or the Hubble Space Telescope is programmed to record images of space). An apparatus is not only a conduit for image-making, it is also a particular conduit. But, unless one is educated about the history that shaped the apparatus and about the limits the apparatus promotes, an image created with it does not reveal its mode of production. It just appears to show an instance of truth. A picture of a pretty girl, a cute puppy, a colorized galaxy, a compassionate conservative. Mass-techno images are not only rooted in the texts of science, but in addition they lend themselves to the ends of manipulators, and Flusser strongly advises education about their inherent framing, about their capacity to be Trojan horses for ideologies, in short, about the entirety of their implicit, man-made texts.

"But this is not the entire truth. There also are techno-images that are not part of the apparatus-operator complex that is grinding everything into stereotypes. These elite techno-images can be seen everywhere: in science and technology, in politics and in art, and they are distinguished from mass techno-images by the fact that only specialists are able to read them. They are conscious efforts to make terminology imaginable [...] Thus, our predicament permits two prognoses: (1) Either the apparatus-operator-complexes will imbibe all texts to recode them into techno-images and to then broadcast them around while also grinding the elite techno images into mush, (2) or the elite techno-mages will lead to a new level of consciousness, from the vantage point of which it will be possible to liberate the world that is encoded in techno-images from the grip of the apparatus operator complex, to serve true human communication." (*Kommunikologie, Frankfurt am Main*, 1998. pp.156, my translation.)

An "elite techno-image" is a means of communication that has as its purpose to construe an existing text, or even to propose new construction. A text is engaged by the person who creates the elite techno-image, who educates herself about the text's history, is aware of its artifice, of its life, and who wishes to share what she found. The elite-techno image is honest about its own premises and limitations, does not hide its own inherent ideologies, but exposes them as far as possible. Examples Flusser gives of elite techno-images are blueprints, charts, designs or diagrams.

Crisis of Linearity

by Vilém Flusser | Translation from German by Adelheid Mers

The hypothesis to be presented here is: Occidental culture is a discourse whose most important information is stored in an alphanumeric code. This code is in the process of being replaced by other, differently structured codes. If this hypothesis were accurate, we would have to count on a fundamental change of our culture in the near future. The change would be fundamental because our thinking, feeling, desiring, acting, and even our perceiving and conceptualizing are to a high degree shaped by the structure of the code in which we experience the world and ourselves. We are >>Western people<< because our >>forma mentis<< has been shaped by the linearity of the alphanumeric code. Should our children and grandchildren experience themselves through differently structured codes (for example through technical images like photos, films, and television, and through digitization) then they would be in the world in a different way than we are, and than our predecessors were. The following thoughts will examine this hypothesis.

From childhood on we are so familiar with the aligning of signs (letters and numbers, for example) that we don't always clearly perceive this gesture's objective. It is first the gesture of enumeration, and only secondly the gesture of narration (of accounting to the end). For example, this gesture can be recognized in the stringing of shells to make a necklace. Accordingly, this gesture is ancient and can probably be found in all cultures. But this ges-

ture of lining up has a unique history in the eastern Mediterranean that lasted a few thousand years and finally, around the middle of the second millennium B.C. led to the invention of the alphabet, to be a mark of our culture until the present, without many changes. This development began with the lining up of stylized images (of pictograms) and ended with the aligning of phonetic signs (letters) into lines of text. For lack of space the description of this evolution will be omitted here, even though it would be enlightening and outright exciting. But its point of origin (the enumeration of pictograms) demands consideration.

Looking at a Mesopotamian, hardened clay tablet in which signs had been inscribed, one can relive the objective hidden behind it. This gesture was about the tearing out of image elements (pixels) from the picture plane and ordering them into rows. It was a picture-tearing, iconoclast gesture. Its intent was to tear up images to enumerate, to account for their content, to be able to narrate, to >>clarify<< images: It was an enlightening gesture. The question that now poses itself is this: Why is it necessary to explain pictures? Why enlightenment? To answer, one has to consider how pictures are made.

Let's take as an example one of the oldest pictures known to us (maybe that of a pony at Peche-Merle). This is about views fixed on stonewalls. The picture fabricator stepped back from a pony, contemplated it, and inscribed

Here it is, a much-appreciated support of my long-standing urge (initially an artist's whim) to diagram texts. As I read it, Flusser allows that the practice of diagramming can be part of a strategy to better the world because it is well suited to point to the fact that structures are always present, hidden in plain view, waiting to be modeled. The question Flusser does not address is how best to transform an elite techno-image into a popular techno-image, but the emphasis he places on dialog throughout his entire body of writing offers guidance. One way an elite-techno-image can become a popular techno-image is if the structure it models is animated in conversation.

diagrams

Georgia had asked me to write about my research process, the work that leads up to and includes diagramming. That's when I offered her my translation of *Crisis of Linearity*. Finding Flusser was a pivotal point in my thinking about how I work. AF (ante Flusser) and PF (post Flusser). AF consisted of recurring diagramming incidents that very, very slowly thickened into a conscious practice. I remember all of those incidents. (1) I diagrammed a bacteriophage after my biology teacher's description. None of the other kids in the class seemed to want to do it, and I was immensely proud that I was able to pull it off. (2) Wittgenstein's Tractatus, two pages of being lost at sea among arrows. (3) In my first year of art school, a sculpture after Benjamin Lee Whorf. A cross, knife blades protruding from each arm, a person in the center—as we order the world, it appears to show itself to us. (3) Next, I attacked not figurative language, but a painting: the angels from Altordorfer's "Birth of Mary" escaped their circle and found themselves in new arrangements with frogs, plants and dotted lines. (4) Next, Gabo's circle sculptures were points of departure, flattened paper copies leading to hinged plywood objects whose blades could be rearranged around their empty centers. I thought at the time that the most engaging humans had empty centers, like the eye of a powerful storm, and that accidental folds provided structure. There are no backgrounds, no foundations, only configurations. (5) After moving to Chicago, the art object began to forcefully retreat, and I gave chase: not sculptures, but floor sculptures; not floor sculptures, but puddles of light; not light installations, but audiences; not audiences, but conventions; not conventions, but what seemed to be largely unexamined, underlying assumptions about art, life, politics; the retreat was halted when I ran into a wall of books. Texts were places where thoughts were temporarily arrested, so they could be examined and redeployed, records to be played and sampled. (6) Diagrams became documents of my readings. From the perspective of PF, everything that happened AF is now reframed and retold as having headed toward a diagramming practice. Pesky historical habits die slowly.

practicing

At times I envy my colleagues, the quick-witted historians and philosophers who can swiftly build, discern, hold in mind and traverse entire architectures of thought. In comparison, I am slow and clumsy. I stalk a prey without knowing what it is—a particular crease or fold in the continuum—following hunches along disparate lines of inquiry, picking and choosing based on criteria that seem to be physically embedded in my experience but aren't apparent unless thought matter sticks to them in a particular, site-specific way. Then I get very, very excited. There is a sense of discovery, of high drama. I want to show you, and then I want to tell you about what I'm showing you. There is no methodology, just an idiosyncratic method. That, by the way, is how I have come to define art. Given art's methodology as attention to non-literate thought, its methods are as many as there are artists. My non-literate thought just happened to direct me towards words, as the sources of the images seen and made and talked about today. **BP**

the fleeting vision into the memory of the wall. He did it this way, so others could recognize the vision. And he did all these extraordinarily complex things so that his vision could serve as a guide for future actions (for instance for the pony hunt). The function of the picture as a plate for orientation is significant here (our intent is to consider what motivates linear writing). The process of lining up pictograms began when trust in pictures as guides for orientations in the world started to diminish. But one cannot do justice to the matter if one does not attempt to zoom in on the gesture of picture making.

Stepping back from the object (for example from the pony) could be a mysterious movement if all of us hadn't concretely experienced it. One doesn't just step from one place into the other (for example onto a hill above the pony) but one steps to a non-place (into one's own interior). One becomes a subject of the thing to be envisioned. One doesn't continue to insist in the objective world, but one now ek-sists. This human (mysterious) ability to step back, to become subject, to exist, is called >>the power of imagination<<, and it has consequences. An abyss of alienation opens between the human being and the objective world, and from this distance, objects are no longer >>manifest<< (graspable). Our arms are not long enough to bridge the abyss. The world is no longer a resistance against which we push, but it becomes an apparition, which we behold. We now doubt if this phenomenal world that we are imagining

here really is objective. Still, this unpleasantness has an advantage: We cannot grasp the items any longer, but we can oversee the circumstances. (We only see the forest after we cease to bump into the trees.) This is the function of our imagination: Even though it is ontologically doubtful, it serves a subsequent handling of the objects. (One is better able to hunt the pony if one has previously made a picture of it for oneself.) For the following reasons, the inventors of linear writing believed that the hunt still did not go well enough:

The vision one gains when stepping back from an object is fleeting, and it has to be fixed in a memory to serve as a model for future acting. The power of imagination alone is insufficient when it comes to image making. Storing the vision in a memory demands that it be codified. That means: translated into symbols which can be interpreted by others. Image making demands that the subjectively seen is translated into intersubjectivity (that something private is being published). It now becomes obvious that the image codes are necessarily connotative: that they allow diverse interpretations by their receivers. (Denotative images, encoded to allow just one reading, become possible only after the invention of linear writing.) If images can be interpreted differently by each receiver, they are not reliable models.

A further, iconoclastic consideration complicates the thought: Like all mediations, images suffer from

continued on page 20

an inner dialectic. They are intended to mediate between human beings and the objective world (to bridge the abyss of alienation), but thus they also block the path between the world and human beings. They present themselves in front of the objects instead of presenting them, and so they increase the alienation they were supposed to alleviate. What follows is that humans don't use the images as orientations in the world, but vice versa: They use their experiences with the world to get oriented in the images. They no longer use the images in function of the world, but treat the world in function of the images. Such a reversal of the ontological position of images is called >>idolatry<<, and the resulting mode of action is called >>magical<<.

The motivations of the inventors of linear writing may, somewhat anachronistically, be phrased like this: imagination is an ontologically doubtful stance, the resulting images are connotative, and they are subject to the inner dialectic inherent in all mediation. But it is inevitable to make images before one undertakes to act. Accordingly, these images must be subjected to a critique that allows to clarify their ontological position, to denote their codes and to clear away the ideological confusion they initiated. Particularly for the purpose of critique linear writing was invented. One can see, in this (admittedly somewhat modernizing) phrasing, the invention of linear writing was given the word as the germ of future, Western culture.

In this phrasing all linear writing appears as a description of images, as a critique of the imagination based on a new mode of thought. What characterizes this new, critical manner of thinking is the fact that it is not structured in a two-dimensional, planar way like the imagination, but one-dimensionally, line-like. Critique of images is basically a transcoding from plane to line. The new thinking that becomes a contender with the invention of linear writing is poorer by one dimension than pictorial thought, it is more >>abstract<<, which means: removed by an additional step from the objective world. That only becomes entirely clear when phonetic signs (letters) are used in writing.

If one regards the intertwined development of writing from pictograms to letters from the outside, so to say, it is not apparent why one should forge such a strong connection between writing and speaking. The downfalls of the codes are obvious: To read a text, one has to first learn the language it has been recorded in, and what one cannot say, one cannot write either. That means: The alphanumeric code forces writing thought to submit to speaking thought, and if the code becomes dominant, all remaining modes of thought become impoverished (except for those that can intrude into the code, thanks to numbers). This can be confirmed in a comparison with extra-Western codes (especially those of the Far East).

When observing the development of writing towards the alphabet from the inside (that means: as a writing being), it becomes inevitable. The objective of linear writing is to critique the imagination. The method used is the transcoding of images into lines. Since prehistoric times we have possessed a code, spoken language, which fulfills this task. Images have always been critiqued as they were conjured up; they were transcoded from their planar existence into the line of discourse and thus became tellable. This conjuring up of the imagination was a pretty uncivilized procedure, up until the invention of the alphabet: back then one spoke, without clearly articulating. With an almost closed mouth (>>mythical<<).

That means: The code of the spoken language could have possibly been even more connotative than the code of the images. The alphabet was invented to denote the speaking code (to subjugate it to the clear and distinct rules of linear writing) and to refashion it into an effective tool for a critique of the imagination. That means: The alphabet was invented to clearly articulate language (to de-mythologize it) and then to use language to critique the imagination (to de-magicize the images). Initially, the alphabet teaches us to speak clearly and only then it teaches us to critique our imagination. It teaches us to think un-mythically and to act un-magically.

This pedagogical function of alphabetic writing is an extensive process, biographically as well as historically. The gesture of stringing letters expresses a specific way of thinking, but then refers back to this way of thinking and reinforces it: The more texts one writes (and reads), the more textually one thinks, and the more textually one thinks, the more one writes and reads. The feedback between thinking and writing has an effect on brain functions: Neurophysiology is beginning to localize centers of writing and functions of writing in the brain. Our brain is differently organized and it processes the acquired information differently than the brain of illiterates. (Unfortunately, the problem of cultural conditioning of inherited traits has to be excluded here.)

Conversely, it is imperative to quickly sketch the mental revolution that followed the alphabet. The material world is no longer perceived as a circumstance, but as a bundle of linear processes. That means that time no longer circles above to order everything, but it now streams and forcefully carries all things with it. The world of objects is no longer scenic, but historic. Every situation becomes the result of causes – and the cause of results. Nothing in the world repeats anymore, but each moment is unique. The mood of the eternal return of the same (the magic mood) is replaced by the dramatic mood of linear progress (and it is secondary if this progress is seen as a fall from a perfect original situation or as a rise to utopian situations.) Differently said: the alphabetic critique of the imagination leads to a linear, causal explanation of images. Sketched here is historical consciousness.

It further needs to be said that the close connection of writing to speaking through the alphabet had the distinctive result that the rules of thought were initially posited as equal to the rules of writing (>>orthography<<) and then to the rules of language (>>logic<<). That finally had to propel historical thinking into an attitude of pan-logism: >>all that is, is logic<<. That means: The rules of language are first projected into images, and then are projected through those into the world of objects, only to be retrieved as laws of nature. From this perspective, the famous >>adaequatio intellectus ad rem<< appears as a retrieval of the alphabetic script from the described objects. This closing of the circle of writing (of enlightenment altogether), this post-Hegelian critique of natural science and of its technology, is only a young phenomenon that already indicates the crisis of linearity. In the preceding, 3500 year evolution of alphabetic writing (in the previous history of the West) this contemporary crisis is not palpable.

At the beginning of history (around 1500 B.C., when the alphabet was invented) texts proceeded against images, to narrate them and to thus explain them away. (Only accessible to a small class of literati at that time, the

historical consciousness engaged in opposition against the magico-mythical consciousness of the masses.) But the images fought back against this attack and illustrated the texts which tried to explain them away. This dialectic between text and image strengthened both: the magico-mythical and the historical consciousness. Thus the images became increasingly >>historical<<, the texts more >>imaginary<<. (This dialectic is exemplified particularly well in the development of mediaeval Christianity: the heathen images became more Christian, and the Christian texts became more >>illuminated<<). One may claim that up until the invention of the printing press the >>text/image<< dialectic drove Western history.

With the availability of the printing press, texts became cheaper and so historical consciousness became increasingly common. Images were expelled from the everyday into enclaves that were sanctified by auras, and nothing withstood the inner dynamic of the line of text any longer. Natural science and technology could develop, the industrial revolution became feasible, and the magico-mythical consciousness that had been repressed into the subliminal realm had to bow to the successes of this progress: It proved that a thoroughly critiqued imagination actually did lead to better pony hunting than an un-critiqued one. The enlightenment of thinking (and the associated action) that had been possible thanks to the invention of the alphabet appeared to be finally victorious, and it seemed to conquer the whole planet earth, beyond the West.

For reasons that unfortunately cannot be discussed here, the alphabet soon proved to be a code not entirely adequate for the critique of imagination. Other, non-phonetic, ideographic symbols, namely numbers, had to be introduced. These symbols express a different mode of thinking than the logical mode, and in spite of extraordinarily spirited efforts (see Russell-Whitehead) attempts to bring logical thinking onto a common denominator with mathematical thinking were not successful. The alphanumeric code is divided within itself, and this internal contradiction had to lead to its crisis, as we can discern from our current vantage point. From the perspective of the considerations undertaken here, this inner contradiction can be formulated as such: While letters unravel the surface of an image into lines, numbers grind this surface into points and intervals. While literal thinking spools scenes as processes, numerical thought computes scenes into grains. For a long time these modes of thought could walk jointly, with literal thinking keeping the upper hand because both modes were directed against surface thinking. But as images became increasingly enlightened, numerical thinking had to poise itself against literal thinking, to submit it to its grinding, analyzing critique. Linear, process-oriented, historical thinking sooner or later had to fall victim to analytical, structural, zero-dimensional, point-thinking.

Mathematical consciousness began to attack historical consciousness quite early, as indicated by the names >>Heraclitus<< and >>Democritus<<. While for Heraclitus >>everything flows<<, everything is process-oriented, Democritus describes dots that accidentally deviate from their paths and collide to constitute the world of objects. Already, the differing moods of historical and mathematical consciousness are clearly discernible: For Heraclitus everything is necessary (causally explainable), with Democritus everything is accidental (at best to be explained statistically). We cannot fully comprehend now why

the ancients saw sadness in Heraclitus' causality and joy in Democritus' chance, while we rather feel absurdity as we are about to enter into the mode of Democritus.

During the course of history Democritus' >>atomistic<< thinking was suppressed (and numbers were subjugated to letters), because mathematical thought was perceived as empty. Actually, the numerical code is so clear and distinct, that unfillable intervals gape between each two symbols. (The interval between 1 and 2 can never be filled with numbers, for example 1,1, so that what is to be enumerated, for example an image, can slip out between the intervals.) When it became evident after the imagination had been explained away that the objective world demanded numbers (or that letters demand to be recoded into numbers), the emptiness of this code had to be confronted. Descartes began to fill the intervals, and calculus as invented by Leibniz and Newton transformed the numerical code into an instrument that permitted the description of processes. This is why a process that was explained by a differential calculation was perceived as >>explained<<. What was left to undertake was the attempt to recode the equation back into letters, for the benefit of non-mathematicians. A condition already quite pitiful for linear, historical thought. But that couldn't be all. The invention of computation machines made it unnecessary to painstakingly fill in the intervals by artful feats of calculation: the machines spit out numbers automatically, in a quantity that deposes of all linearity.

Important in assessing the revolt of numbers against letters is the observation that numerical thought (entirely counter to its name) does not enumerate (and so does not tell), but that it pulls apart into point elements and then mounts those elements in a heap. An algorithm is not an enumerated, but an initially broken up and then re-computed circumstance. Someone who is mathematically trained can discern a number of circumstances from the structure of an algorithm, all connected to each other by a common structure. Numerical thought, as it is currently emerging from literal thought, is a formal, entirely abstract thought: It is zero-dimensional and so a step further removed from the world of objects than literal thought. This highest possible abstraction as it is reached in mathematical thought was inbuilt into the stream of literal thinking throughout history: Algorithms formed islands within texts made from letters. For a while now, mathematical, calculating thought has been breaking out from within the alphanumeric code, is claiming independence, and it is turning against linear thought, to analyze it, and (surprisingly, but certainly not unexpectedly) to lead to a new form of imagination. In other words, it begins to no longer encode itself in numbers, but in differently characterized point symbols, and it is opposing those new codes to the texts. This recoding of calculating thought is most clearly visible in its first emergence from linearity, in photography, and for that reason must be given closer scrutiny.

The camera is a contraption that takes in light and captures it on molecules of a chemical compound. The reactions thus initiated result in a negative copy of the objects from which the light originated. This can also be shown differently: The camera is a contraption that catches information, calculates it in bits, stores it in a memory, and computes it in such a way that it can be called up as images. The first characterization of the camera function is as a process, <<Heraklitian>>: The photographic operation appears as a series of chemical, optical and mechanical processes. The second

presentation of the camera function is calculating, <<Democritian>>: In it, the photographic operation appears as a processing of data. The first presentation explains the camera in a causal manner: as result of previous, scientific and technological developments. The second presentation explains the camera in a projective way: as a primitive computer. In the second presentation, the new thinking that is no longer linear comes to bear.

For which purpose was the camera invented? The inventors themselves may have answered: to automate the making of pictures and thus to focus the imagination on its essential characteristic, which is to step back from the world of objects. But seen in the projective manner, this answer is insufficient. It should be: to process a dot-interval-code to open a passage for something that never existed before, namely, a programming imagination. This entity that never existed before is being interrogated here.

To step back from the object is a gesture of abstraction: One extracts oneself from the objects, and thus the images are two-dimensional abstractions of objects. But to photograph is a concretizing gesture: one collects (computes) grains, and so photos are two-dimensional concretions of zero-dimensional dots and intervals (of calculations). They are >>grainy pictures<<. Two opposing imaginations are in contention here. The first refers back to the objects, it >>signifies<< the world of objects. The second refers back to calculations, it >>signifies<< a world that has been fully calculated. On first glance, this cannot be gathered from the photographs: They seem to signify objects. This is the case because photographs (like films and videos) are phenomena of transition. In them, the two imaginations overlap. Because information is processed in cameras (light rays) that had been emitted from objects. The new imagination first comes into its own in the realm of synthetic computer images. A synthetic image of an airplane does not signify an object, but a calculation, and it is a model for potential, not for actual objects. In short: The first imagination makes images which are intended to serve as models, and the second imagination makes models, which are intended to picture calculations.

Photographs, films and videos are phenomena of transition. (This makes them so interesting in terms of understanding the current crisis.) Cameras are built in a way that the calculations that are fed into them actually signify objects. But the people who build and feed cameras (the programmers of pictures) employ the second imagination: These pictures are images of their calculations and so are models for a programmed behavior on the side of their receivers. The photographers are film and TV people who push the trigger, doing this in the belief that they are taking pictures of objects. But all these people are technologically redundant: triggers can function automatically. The actual image makers are the programmers. The surge of photographs, films and TV pictures that envelopes us is already, albeit covertly, the expression of a new calculating way of thinking, which articulates itself in dot codes, to compute these into pictures.

As said before: This new way of thinking is expressed clearly for the first time in computers. Because most of us do not yet have daily experiences with computers, but receive by far the largest part of the daily amount of information courtesy of the pictures described above, it is prudent to acknowledge the revolution that these grainy pictures have wrought in our thinking already. Before we shall try to focus

on the outright calculating and computing, it is imperative to consider the >>photographic view<<, through which we see the world and ourselves within it, and thanks to which we have already jumped out of linearity.

The fact that we increasingly experience the world through grainy pictures like photos and TV and less through printed, linear texts is obviously not responsible for construing it more and more as a heap of particles and less as a flux of events. Responsible for this new mode of understanding is the fact that we increasingly encode our information in mathematical codes and less in letter codes, and that fact enables the new, grainy pictures. Conversely, it can be claimed that the grainy pictures enable us to factually see the information: not our cognition, but our worldview is informed by pictures of that kind. This >>photographic view<< of ours shall be presented through several examples, first in a short series of >>epistemological<< photos, and then in an even shorter series of >>ethic-aesthetic<< photos.

(1) We no longer imagine that objects surround us solidly and treacherously, confront us and condition us, but rather that particles rush around in the void (outside as well as within us), and that we somehow process this rushing into objects. (2) We no longer imagine that we live in a world in which matter is moved by forces (for example stars by gravitation, or metal shavings by magnetism), but rather that we are immersed in undulating fields, in the vales of which we had previously envisioned materiality. (3) We no longer imagine that life on earth consists of organisms that cooperate or fight each other, but rather that an undulating mush (the >>biomass<<) covers the surface of the earth, that its droplets (the >>nuclei<<) contain genetic information (particles ordered in chains), that the droplets continuously divide, that in this process information may accidentally be transmitted falsely, and that organisms are outgrowths of these aberrations, which rise from the mush just to sink back into it. (4) We no longer imagine that mental processes (for example perceptions, imaginings, feelings, wishes, thoughts or decisions) are some kind of entities, but rather, that this is about computations of point elements, which are processed in the synapses of the brain. (5) We no longer imagine that we contain some solid kernel (some kind of >>identity<<, an >>I<<, a >>spirit<< or a >>soul<<), but rather that we are immersed in a collective psychic field, from which we emerge like temporary bubbles, acquire some information, process, share, to submerge again. (6) We no longer imagine that the individual cultures that shape our life are some kind of independent structures, but rather that we are immersed in an undulating field of culturemes, from which the individual cultures emerge through computation, just to blur again, while it remains open how much of that is accidental or intentional.

These six >>photographs<< are images of calculations and models for manipulation. They permit the manufacture of artificial objects, artificial matter, artificial living beings, artificial intelligences, artificial identities, artificial cultures. They are examples for a new power of imagination that we presently have available to us.

(7) We no longer imagine that society is a group of people who have somehow been placed in relation to each other, but rather, that we live within a field of inter-subjective relations, in an undulating net that constantly reties and unties. Thus the historic question: >>does society serve humans or do humans serve society?<< becomes fundamentally mea-

ningless. Social reality is the relation from which human and society are abstract extrapolations, and the knots of the social network might as well be manned by artificial intelligences as by humans, or even stay empty. Political engagement can no longer be an effort to change society or the human being, but the attempt to program (technocracy) or deprogram (terrorism) the field of social relations. (8) We no longer imagine that we are in chains (for example chains of causality, or in a bustle of laws and regulations), and that freedom is the effort to break those chains, but rather that we are immersed in an absurd chaos of contingencies, and that freedom is the attempt to give this chaos shape and meaning. (This reshaping of the question >>freedom from what<< into >>freedom for what<< is extraordinarily characteristic for the rupture in our thinking.) (9) We no longer imagine that we perceive the world and ourselves as >>reality<<, but rather that we ourselves process the perceived into reality. Thus we see in our life no longer a movement that changes given realities, (for example things and ourselves), but rather a tendency to realize given possibilities within us and around us. That means: Our values are no longer those of labor, but rather those of creativity, of the computation of information.

The last three >>photos<< are less in focus than the six of the first series because the calculating thinking is less trained in the area of values than in the area of cognition. But they are better at showing what is meant here by >>Crisis of Linearity<<. Namely, that the transition from one-dimensional to zero-dimensional codes does not only come with new categories of cognition (for example probability calculus instead of causal explanation, or propositional calculus instead of logic), but comes with altogether new categories (predominantly values).

This excursus into the >>photographic view<< was intended to present how the disposition of life changes after the eruption of the dot-interval-thinking from linear thought. How differently are we present when we emerge from the Heraclitian flux to step into the Democritian rain. It is obviously true that it is possible to reduce both sides to each other: to see a thin river in the rain, or a river in a dense rain. (To see a process as a stream of particles, the particle as an aspect of process, the row as a series of dots, the dot as an element of a row). But with this the radical break in the disposition is not eliminated: As soon as we are no longer disposed historically (alphanumerically), but computationally (digital), our lie gains a new coloration. It shall now be attempted to grasp this.

People (for example our grandchildren) sit in front of a computer keyboard, push one key after the other, dot after dot appears on a monitor, and images come into existence. These images will for all practical considerations stay loaded into a memory forever, but can also be transported through cables or other media, to be refashioned by others (humans or artificial intelligences) and thus altered, they may be sent back. Why do these people do that?

Here is the answer that would likely be given by someone who thinks historically, in a linear manner: The images that are created by these people are depictions of calculations and can serve as models for changing the world. For example, these people calculate bridges, and robots can actually build bridges following these images. These people participate in a dialog meant to change the world, and their computers are instruments that permit working up

newer and newer models of world changing based on a continuously materializing consensus. What happens here can be phrased in this way: humans want to (have to) change the world, and with it themselves. To achieve this they first retreated from the objective world, to make a picture of it for themselves (the case of the pony). Then they subjected this image to a linear critique (the case of the alphanumerical explanation). Thereafter they calculated this linear critique (the case of the numerical analysis). And now they have at their disposal a new power of imagination that allows them to project synthetic images that are already entirely critiqued and analyzed. That's how people achieved the goal that they aimed for since the beginning of humanity: Digital code is the perfect method to change the world after one's heart's desire (perfect for hunting ponies).

That is probably not the answer our grandchildren would give. Behind the keyboard whose keys they press is a swarm of particles, and this swarm is a field of possibilities to be realized. Thanks to each key press it is possible to confer shape onto the absurd chaos of this >>I-0<< accident, it can be informed. The information thus retrieved can be stored and dialogically re-informed. All that occurs with great speed, so that the amount of created instances of information is very large, including some entirely unexpected ones. One adventure after the other emerges from chaos and appears on the monitor. So what matters is not only an advancing realization of virtualities contained in this chaos, but mainly to progress from surprise to surprise, from adventure to adventure, jointly with others. It is true, though: automatic machines can project some of the created instances of information outside of the conversation and thus change the field of possibilities of the >>world<<. But the creative giddiness that grabs hold of one in this pure play is not based on the applicability of dialog. On the contrary, it is a symptom of the fact that the player is realizing himself, jointly with others. Our grandchildren will likely say: We do this because through this we realize ourselves inter-subjectively and thus give meaning to our absurd life.

The intent of the considerations presented here was not to promote some telematic utopia based on digital codes. It is not very likely that the historical, occidental culture that is in a state of crisis will actually be replaced by such a utopia, once the alphanumerical code loses its preponderance. What was intended here was to suggest a point of view that counters a widespread cultural pessimism: Doubtlessly, we would lose much if we lost the linear code, and with it historical, process oriented, critical thinking. Almost everything that we identify with. But then other abilities would come into play that we have not yet utilized. The Crisis of Linearity, the first phases of which we are experiencing, is mainly a challenge to us: We should mobilize the newly emerging power of imagination to overcome the crisis, in us and around us. This consideration wishes to be regarded in the sense of an experiment with a new power of imagination. **BP**

The above translation follows the German text "Krise der Linearität", published in Absolute Vilém Flusser, Hg. v. Nils Röllner and Silvia Wagnermaier, Freiburg: orange-press 2003

Some simple thoughts without any wish to make them more profound*

by Anne-Laure Oberson

On pages 95 and 96 of Gilles Deleuze's *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, the French philosopher discusses how philosophy brings to an absolute the relative deterritorialization (*déterritorialisation*) of capital, abolishes it as an interior limit, turns it against itself, and calls for a new land, a new people, thus getting closer in concept to what Adorno called "negative dialectic" and the Frankfurt School designated as "utopia."¹ For Deleuze, it is utopia that makes the link (*jonction*) between philosophy and its time (*époque*). Utopia allows philosophy to become political and heightens the critique of its time. He goes on to explain that the word used by the utopist Samuel Butler "Erewhon" does not refer only to "No-where", (*ou-topos*) or nowhere (*nulle-part*) but to "Now-here", (*eu-topos*) or the here and now (*ici-maintenant*). So what is relevant is not the difference between a utopian or a scientific socialism, but the diverse types of utopia, revolution being one of them. He concludes this development by stating that utopia designates this "conjunction of philosophy or of the concept with the present environment: the political philosophy." This gives us a reading of the word "utopia" that is grounded in the here and now, that is about a connection with what is most real. Thus can we ask ourselves what is this inverted *nowhere here and now? A somewhere there tomorrow? A distant location in the future?*

This brief theoretical introduction is a lead to grasp some considerations of the present state of the art world in different localities, while acknowledging the unequivocal attraction to displacements, in reference to specific recent experiences and thoughts. The form, therefore, will be informal; will zap from articles to links to first-hand discussions and encounters. An essay, as in *essayer* (to try), to outline an ambient malaise, a growing feeling of dissatisfaction.

[...] Do you really inhabit the place you are currently living in? This seems like a silly question but think twice about it. Aren't we all our own little utopias, always connected to somewhere else, on the go—if not physically, then virtually, never actually being where we are — in a constant projection, in between places?

[...] This struck me as I passed by a man walking his dogs on the street, when he said out loud (to me?): "She must go from sadness to anger." Speaking, presumably in a hidden ear-set connected to his mobile phone, to someone else — but to me, somewhere else. Strangely I could have taken his words to be addressed to me; they fit momentarily, in an uncanny way, regardless of his intention. Not so long ago witnessing someone talking out loud on his or her own, the first thought would have been, "Here is a crazy person." There was known to be a few in town — usually loud talkers, loonies. Strangely they seem to have disappeared with the new breed of *televisionaries*, who now sound perfectly normal to us, and not the least bit delusional. Or they might have blended in with the mass of loud talking so well that no one pays attention anymore. What feels like centuries ago, this man and I would have courteously exchanged greetings. Living in the same neighborhood, we might even have become acquainted (what an old-fashioned sounding word). Today I can foretell that we will never address a word to each other. No matter how many times our routes cross. The more we are connected, the more we are isolated.

[...] Back at home, I am in another kind of displacement, already somewhere else online, which incidentally makes me think that we might be more present in those so-called non-places than in the comfort of our sofas. We are only truly there... in the distance always. Hence a feeling of lack of something fulfilling, that drives us to always accomplish more. Physicality is not a guarantee of presence any longer.

[...] The cell phone episode echoes in my mind with some other thoughts I had about the title of this year's Sao Paulo biennial, *How to live together*. "How," as a question, implies a previous intention: we want to live together, we need to find out how—or a precedent condition: we live together, albeit not so well, so let's think how else. Incidentally, none of the works that I saw attempted to outline an answer. Most, if not all, pointed at a sad fact: we don't live together. Less and less, if at all, despite our intention to seek change, I doubt we truly want to live together. When it occurs, we live next to each other, and that seems to be more than we can handle already.

[...] On a resume of one of the selected artist of Saatchi's new YourGallery website for the Guardian exhibition, I read the following: "Lives and works in London and Berlin, and New York, Madrid and Los Angeles." Well? Is this for real or what's with the existential crisis? After an initial "Yeah right, me too!" reaction, I decided not to be so judgmental and wrote an email to said artist kindly requesting that s/he shared with me, for the sake of research information for this article, what exactly was it like to live in five cities? I got a reply quite a few days after my initial request proposing to meet in Berlin to discuss the question. Well, Berlin not currently being on my roadmap, I declined the invitation but insisted to continue sharing information over emails. Yet to be answered... One of my questions was whether it is a necessity as an artist today to reside in several places or whether one could achieve the same goals by living and working in only one place. Inevitably, one could never be at the right place at the right time, and would always be missing something in either place while presumably being part of more events.

[...] In a recent article, Danah Boyd, a social media researcher who studies patterns of behaviors in online social networking sites, remarks that "MySpace had become an electronic version of the local mall or park, [...] These sites act as digital public spaces."² The article further explains that the need for such places is even more acute today, as traditional real-world public spaces have disappeared... But have they, or do we no longer know how to make use of them? When is the last time you sat on a bench next to a stranger and picked up a conversation? Has flesh and blood reality, unprotected from the sheer screens of our computers, become way too real? Or is it that we have unlearned to live unmediated new experiences? While paradoxical, today, "one of the metrics of success is how much attention you get regardless of for what" and the more exposed you are the better.³

[...] My friend, Paula Boettcher, wrote a courageous open-letter when she closed down her gallery in November 2003. I have kept this letter since, and I stumbled on it the other day. As much as I wish it could be reproduced here in its entirety, I will quote just a few lines:

The successful post-modern artist is not identified with the depth and content of his message but with the efficiency of his narcissistic gestures in terms of media and consumer effectiveness. The more easily the artist's gestures can be consumed and the more spectacular they appear, the better the chance for the artist's success. His work becomes a commodity, his name a brand. [...] But it is a problem if an artist defines himself solely by way of his media and consumer effectiveness and when he comes to terms with the scene. Marches along uniformed. Celebrates the spectacle with a smug smile. To be part of it is all that matters.

[...] This attitude of the loud gesture on behalf of the artists, and of all the other actors in an art scene, often leads to a lot of void and ill-adapted solutions because they are gimmicks, mimics and not based on pertinent local issues. Athens is not London. Geneva is not Paris. If there are no borders, or if art abolishes borders, then "global" should not rhyme with *Equal*.⁴ What we should be in search of instead is diversity of voices, of approaches; and along the way, recognize one's own characteristics, accept and play with them. And keep in mind: It is not how bad your game is, it's how well you play it.

[...] Utopia was often a way for exclusion rather than inclusion, i.e. small communities keeping to themselves to ascertain the success of the innovative structure. I think that if we invent new types of utopias we must ensure that as individuals carrying in ourselves such potentialities, we bridge them and enclose diversity. The key in connectedness is not homogenization but poly-culturalism.

[...] If indeed art communities are not evolving in tandem, if there are still strong particularities to be found across the globe — as this magazine is attempting (and I hope achieving) to make the point — we must aim to preserve and present them, rather than obliterate them. How do we engage with our community, or should I say communities, when we are everywhere at once? Personally I can already witness that as I have reduced the time and regularity of my stays in Athens, I am growing slowly but surely out of touch. Does that mean that I am now less entitled to participate in a local discourse and would instead risk applying general considerations like an all-purpose balm? No, it does not have to. Utopias, remember, carry critical and innovative capacities. But it means that I have to make double or triple the efforts to be aware and stay connected by means of close collaboration with people involved locally. The difference—the bird's eye view—that I can bring as an outsider is only so good as it does not flatten out the folds but strikes a raking light on them. Our personal utopia should mean that since we are connected, we must not be isolated. **BP**

1. Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1991
2. Graham Bowley, "The high priestess of internet friendship," in *FT WEEKEND* (London), Saturday October 28 Sunday October 29 2006, p. 3.
3. Philosophers and psychoanalysts recently coined this shift in our attitude to privacy as "publicity" (*extimité*). The French term is proposed by Serge Tisseron in *L'Intimité surexposée*, Paris: Ramsay, 2001. Although the notion of extime is recognized in Jacques Lacan's seminar *L'éthique de la psychanalyse* (1981) by Jacques-Alain Miller in *Extimité* (1985-1986), in his course *L'orientation lacanienne*, unpublished. The English term "publicity" is attributed to Herbert Marshall McLuhan. It is uncertain which precedes the other or if they appeared simultaneously in parallel.
4. The play on the common adjective and the brand name by use of a capital and italics, allows me to qualify, in an extreme shortcut manner (I shall certainly have to elaborate at another occasion), today's global art production as an ersatz for the real stuff that certainly does not make you gain weight.

* This title is taken from the subtitle of Alexei Shulgin's article *Art, Power, and Communication* published in *Parachute 85*, 1997. To read his article and for more info on Alexei Shulgin refer to www.easylife.org

Never give out your password or credit card number in an instant message conversation

instant message conversation by Serkan Özkaya and Vasif Kortun



No New Artists (inspired by Les Levine), 2003

As a guest curator at the Tirana Biennial 2003, Vasif Kortun invited me to participate at the show with my project, at that time not-yet-realized, "Today Could Be a Day of Historical Importance." The project was to hand-draw the cover page of a daily newspaper and publish it both as an art work and as the newspaper cover the following day. With the co-curator of the show, Gezim Qendro, we went to the widest distributed newspaper in Albania, "Shekulli" and met at the headquarters with newspaper president Koco Kokedhima's wife. As Gezim told me, meeting with the wife instead of the president was good for our project because she was the one who would decide. Instead of approving the project as it was, she offered me to design the cover of their weekend supplement. Due to lack of ideas or time or both, I wanted to act as a curator myself so, I decided to translate Les Levine's work "No New Artists" to Albanian. The supplement with Levine's image was to be published during the show's opening weekend and distributed at the Biennial's venues as well as at the paperstands with newspapers across the country.

When we did the MSN chat with Vasif, we didn't know that the project was never to be realized. The following is a direct, unedited transcription from that conversation.

Curator says: I want to start with the end. I am curious that the ghost of Duchamp keeps on reappearing in your work. "Jo Artisteve te rinj," or "No new artists," refers to the overrated silence?

Artist says: Why do you call it overrated? Sounds like Beuys. I've been thinking more and more about Beuys recently. how a huge presence his installations have. To what extent he defined the notion of installation in a museum.

Artist says: I guess he said that "Duchamp's silence makes him appear smarter than he really is."

Curator says: Also, the medium of the newspaper as you thought about it before seems like a logical conclusion at the same time to your notions of massification as opposed to simply repetition. The Slideshow Galleries, the proletariat, your interrogation about the status of copyright...

Artist says: Exactly. It's also a mirror. Mirror of history; written history that we hold in our hands everyday. Every morning. It's like reading history one-a-day. You know I am not a very good follower of newspapers or massmedia. This insistence on ignorance gets me surprized everytime I hear people talking about daily facts and not only today's but let's say from ten years ago.

Artist says: Sorry: facts

Artist says: Like what this politician said that time and what Susurluk was all about or Watergate; this must be history I reckon. And i have no whatsoever idea about it.

Curator says: For me the newspaper today is something on my screen. In the early phases of printing and publications, especially before the direct transference of the photograph to the publication, the photos would be redrawn by hand, mostly in engraving form and reprinted. That was interesting in the sense that the hand drawn was a way of compensating the lack that photography espoused.

Curator says: Hence things would be corrected and made significant.

Artist says: My interest is in newspaper as a thing. It's not only a medium. It's something real. something that can supposedly possess an aura.

Curator says: I am curious what kind of correction comes available by the sheer use of the hand, a collective individuality.

Artist says: What correction? (becomes, right?)

Curator says: 😊

Artist says: It's immediate like a mirror. Things happen today and the paper is today. It will be a different thing tomorrow. Remember Orhan's "Kar?" There was this newspaper which wrote things before they happened. And things happened accordingly.

Artist says: History on the one side and faith on the other. Fate? Faith?

Curator says: Right, but it is not a mirror, it is an after-image from a broken mirror and reassembled again. Do you have an issue with access? The newspaper is one of the last witnesses of a massified society of the last century and a half.

Curator says: It is not like the internet where you can customize and reassemble the news to your desires.

Curator says: Your newspaper is an original as each newspaper is exactly an original.

Curator says: In fact there are no copies only originals, in plural!

Artist says: And the reproducibility makes the copy of it an original.

Artist says: Yes. in a way like a book, a work of literature. But in a way like a limited edition, because it is limited. But in yet another way it is unique like an artifact or an artwork, because it happens today and not again.

Curator says: Come back to Duchamp, not in the text only, "No new artists," with the face of papa bush, like a 'no more war,' as Bush says exactly the opposite, so does the text... many more artists, in fact.

continued on page 24

Artist says: I guess I must admit this: it is not a Duchampian strategy of silence, but a post-capitalist gig-management.

Artist says: Now it's hard for me to say if Les Levine was being ironic or if Bush had said that and Levine made this in protest. I can't figure out the intention behind. But let me ask this: To what extent is intention important?

Artist says: And how many times can I duplicate these f ing artworks and they still keep being art works.

Curator says: Not the silence, but throwing into question the parameters of the exhibition institution, what I had desired for Tirana is approaching the biennial from outside and barely getting in through the door.

Curator says: You operating out there in the paper, instant-coffee in their urban disco trailer showing as much stuff as they can without any editing whatsoever (instant coffee is no better than you), and (sorry, we are open), and Florian Zeyfang with a piece that is almost, shall we say, art?

Artist says: I guess it's a matter of interpretation. Like let's say Levine was read ironic. And it meant: "No new artists" and my work is going to be read ironic and it'll mean -- in a biennial context: "No new artists." Like art was okay so far, who needs another Artist. And the one who says this, becomes the artist. There are a few things that today's art cannot afford. Number one is 'being not-ironic.'

Artist says: Yes. There's a certain self-disgust in artists everywhere.

Curator says: Intentionality is important as I want to figure out where you are going. But, this is at the same time like a conspiracy between me and you.

Curator says: My beloved professor died a few days ago. Kirk Varnedoe. Once he had said, "don't talk to the Artist"

Artist says: For instance a young Albanian artist told me his work for the Tirana Biennial was going to be a large wall-text on the National Gallery, the main venue, which will be a quote from Godfather: "Modern artists are faggots. And the collectors are pimps" or something like that. I guess he didn't say pims, but I couldn't understand. But you get the drift, right?

Artist says: Kirk died??!

Curator says: Is irony post-capitalist gig-management?

Artist says: I have his recommendation, remember? "I cannot muster any sympathy towards Brener's action"

Artist says: r.i.p.

Curator says: Cancer, he finished his Princeton lectures and vanished

Artist says: 😞

Artist says: Maybe I should write a new letter to MoMA for "Broadway Boogie Woogie."

Artist says: I wasn't talking about intentionality but intention. Intention appears in the gaze of the reader, no?

Artist says: Where else could it be?

Curator says: Sorry, I was on the wrong track. You had mentioned Les Levine, that is another spin. You use Les Levine's work, OK a reference to the art-lover-Serkan, and use a deauthorized medium. Remember the 90s, Hans Ulrich Obrist, MIP projects, newspapers, inserts, airplane mats with A. Boetti, now the agnes b. publications. Where do you stand vis a vis those?

Artist says: A simple difference. I very much appreciate point d ironie, do it yourself etc, the reproducibility. but my endeavor is to use one situation. You may never be able to distribute point d ironie to the whole country. Or even this: I do not want to create a new design. On the contrary I like what is there and I want to trace it. By tracing I make my own mistakes, leave my fingerprints. I don't think

Artist says: It's more than that. It could be with art history, it could be with history in general.

Artist says: Actually self-disgust triggers a lot of creativity. Use creativity to escape. to postpone. not to make a thing.

Artist says: Get a PhD to postpone the military service.

Artist says: Groucho Marx: "I do not want to be a member of a club which accepts me as a member."

Curator says: And taking it to the people at the same time? Your tracing of the paper is a way to inscribe? What I like most is that we have to put up with it.

Curator says: The readers have to put up with you. Change their reading glasses, read through your interpretation of the daily news.

Curator says: That was not Groucho Marx, it was Karl, no it was Woody Allen.

Curator says: Big difference

Artist says: What is big difference?

Curator says: Irrelevant

Artist says: Insecurity, lost innocence, parody

Curator says: What does this have to do with articulating what you do? I mean the thing out there.

Curator says: I know it does but I am confused between how you feel and how what I see makes me react?

Artist says: The loss of innocence is something when you notice that something is different. and you lose your innocence as a reader. You can't even trust a basic graphic design. That makes you insecure and now every day you expect some kind of a surprize.

Artist says: That I saw on Defne's eyes. When I first handed her a copy of the sketch I made for Radikal, she took it as a Xerox copy. Then I made her notice by saying "I did that" and at that moment she noticed that it was drawn by hand. And no one can ever make her not notice it once again. She saw it once and for all. **BP**



photo: Erinc Seymen

Mock-up, 2003

Destroy Athens Biennial

interview by Georgia Kotretsos

The e-flux announcement I received on Monday, January 16th, 2006 with the subject "The Athens Biennial 1st International Contemporary Art Exhibition 'Destroy Athens'" made me initially believe that I had found myself in Greece at the right time to witness this turning point of contemporary Greek art. I had been back for less than a year and this news confirmed my optimistic outlook on the local art scene. My initial reaction was charged by the excitement of attending such an event in Athens, yet I could not ignore the critical speech bubbles surrounding my head as well as the critical conversations I had been having with colleagues from Greece and abroad. Many of the conversations with artists, curators, or academics outside of Greece, who follow Art around the globe on a 24/7 basis, were caught uninformed about the recent development of Greek art.¹ And it is understandable because I have walked this path. Not so long ago, for those residing outside of Greece it seemed as if contemporary Greek art was one of the best-kept secrets in the art-world, unless there was somebody from the inside to guide one's quest. Despite the exaggeration of my statement, the evident lack of Greek art literature at public or art institutional libraries abroad is a problem for those who wish to follow it and for those who would like to acquaint themselves with it. As a result, there is an immense gap in most people's understanding of Greek art. This is a problem that should be addressed especially when exceptional material does exist but does not circulate among art scholars and educators at art schools, institutions, and universities. Also, the insufficiency of the latest modes of consumption makes it hard to find and purchase such material from abroad, thus fostering in the growth of that gap.

That being said, what are the stages within contemporary Greek art history that naturally led to the Destroy Athens Biennial? How is the concept being communicated to the general Greek public that frowns instinctively upon the directness of the title? How can it be of value when the circumstances could put informed viewers in an uninformed position? Who and what will bridge the non-Greek speaking people's gaps, which may even be as large as the time between antiquity and the first Athens Biennial this year?

On this critical and complex note I contacted the curators Xenia Kalpaktsoglou, Poka-Yio, and Augustine Zenakos, as well as the director, Marieke van Hal, of the Destroy Athens Biennial and invited them each to answer one question hoping they would pop those critical speech bubbles that surrounded my head and settle the skeptical murmur within the art community. Below is our correspondence, along with the concept of the Athens Biennial as it appears on the Athens Biennial official website: www.athensbiennial.org.

Destroy Athens is an attempt to challenge the ways in which identities and behaviours are determined through stereotypical descriptions. The notion of 'Athens' – as the archetypal city that has become emblematic in terms of stereotypes – is used as a metaphor for this feeling of extra-determination or entrapment that the stereotype inflicts upon the personal sense of identity and social behaviour. 'Destruction' is used as the term for the possibility of action against the stereotype, which however does not automatically offer a substitute in its place, something like an exploration of the violent reaction that someone has when they are trapped, without actually using this reaction strategically to replace something with something else.

Cities belong to their inhabitants. Concepts belong to whoever chooses to use them. The exhibition aims to address the concept of 'Athens' in relation to the certainty that whatever we do is due to our good nature, to our perception of a world that is just for all - even for those who maintain that they do not desire to live in the world that we propose to them. Because 'we alone do good to one and the other, not upon a calculation of interest, but in the confidence of freedom'. (Pericles Funeral Oration, Thucydides 40.5)

If one were to claim that what we call the Western civilization has one prevalent characteristic, this would be its certainty that the values by which it believes it is defined and that it defends - justice, equality, democracy, the western way of life - are so noble that they can't but be attractive to others. And it is in this certainty that the West finds a soothing alleviation of guilt: we do not oppress, we teach; we do not conquer, we civilize.

There appears here, of course, an issue of interiority and exteriority: the truth is that while everybody else perceives Athens mostly through its 'positive' stereotypes, its inhabitants perceive it mostly through its 'negative' ones. There are then at least three layers superimposed one upon the other:

Athens as a lived city is perceived almost exclusively through negative stereotyping (e.g., the pollution, the apartment building, the demonstrations) by its inhabitants.

Athens as a site-to-visit is advertised through positive stereotyping (e.g., the antiquities, the Olympic Games, or even Greek hospitality) by the Greek nationalistic construct in absolute accord with the worldwide cultural and tourist industries.

Athens as an emblem of western certainty is conscripted, again through positive stereotyping (e.g., the birthplace of democracy), to alleviate the guilt of a hegemonic civilization. Unsurprisingly, every aforementioned layer is usually expressed through an aesthetic codification, be it the supposed 'real' Athens with its desiccated urban cityscapes, or the tourist Athens with its Acropolis, or the universal, timeless Athens - that imaginary, ahistorical place, where justice and democracy always rule and inspire us.

The 1st Athens Biennial International Contemporary Art Exhibition aims to attack stereotyping, and this is what it invites artists to do. It does not invite them, as is often the case, to 'live' the experience of the city and to create works about its supposed 'reality'. It invites them to destroy their and other's preconceptions, a process that is of concern to everyone everywhere. It invites artists to employ the heretical treatment of the universal and timeless symbol of Athens as a pretext or as a metaphor for an assertion of self-determination. The intention that lies in the heart of these thoughts, however, is not to orchestrate a one-dimensional critique on an existing situation, but to achieve the very questioning of our desire to have an impact on things. Therefore, the stages through which one goes when negotiating feelings of entrapment and impotence, when one, in their quest to discover a mode of articulation and a sense of participation, attempts to turn to a series of alternatives and is confronted by a series of dead-ends, will be explored.

Destroy Athens aims to function as a progression through various themes – elements will contradict, collide or cancel-out each other constantly. Successive realizations and disillusionments will make up a fragmented acknowledgement of a dead-end, a kind of 'world', a dystopic environment of conceptual Waste Lands.

- From www.athensbiennial.org

To Curator Xenia Kalpaktsoglou

Could you please give the Boot Print readers a sneak preview of what is to be expected at the Destroy Athens Biennial in 2007.

Maybe it is premature to announce artist lists and specific projects ten months prior to the exhibition opening. On the whole, though, the artists are invited to work with the particular concept, so we are going to have a number of new works for the exhibition, as well as some pieces already made that seem central to our concerns. The selection will include several established artists, alongside emerging ones. At the same time, a strong focus on interdisciplinary practices, live arts, and performances will be maintained, with the participation of artists groups, performers, activists, etc. In terms of our activities leading up to the exhibition, which will in fact offer a sneak preview of what is to be expected, I should mention the international conference we are organizing on the 17th and 18th February in Athens, which invites theorists, curators, and artists to explore the Destroy Athens concept from different angles. Finally, one can also get an idea of the overall attitude we have towards the exhibition through the various AB Projects, like our online magazine a. the athens contemporary art review (www.athensartreview.org), and the soon-to-be-online artwave radio.

To Curator Poka-Yio

Could the Destroy Athens Biennial be read as the "initiation" of Contemporary Greek Art back into "Art History"?

We love being loved. The Athens contemporary art scene is drawing more and more attention. We know that we are indefinitely going to contribute to this, but it will grow naturally. Let's say that we provide the drinks, the DJs, and some great ambience. Are we gonna party? That remains to be seen. Also, don't forget that the AB is a baby biennial, so let's watch it crawl its first steps.

To Curator Augustine Zenakos

One could argue that there is a large difference between inviting critique by attacking stereotypes and commanding to Destroy (a.) Athens as a dysfunctional city (b.) Athens as a tourist destination and (c.) Athens as an emblem of Western civilization. The confrontational tone of the title draws my attention to a subject that touches on political, socio-economic, geographical, historical, and cultural grounds. Nonetheless, it touches every individual residing in Athens, and elsewhere in Greece. Do you believe Destroy Athens may be the platform where the Contemporary identity of Athens is put at stake? How do you envision the Greek and International community's interpretation of the Destroy Athens Biennial?

I don't quite understand what you mean by 'One could argue there is a large difference...'. Yes, it is true we have conceived of this as a political exhibition, and exhibitions sometimes, thankfully, manage to avoid the oversimplification inherent in most people's perception of politics. So, let me point out that this rather long question actually concerns a few notes on a concept and not an exhibition. In any case, the Destroy Athens concept is indeed an attempt to challenge the ways in which identities and behaviors are determined through stereotypical descriptions. We use the notion of 'Athens' (as the archetypal city that has become emblematic in terms of stereotypes) as a metaphor for this feeling of extra-determination or entrapment that the stereotype inflicts upon the personal sense of identity and social behavior. 'Destruction' we use as the term for the possibility of action against the stereotype, which, however, does not automatically offer a substitute in its place—a vehicle for investigating the emotional and sometimes violent reaction that someone has when they are trapped, without actually using this reaction strategically to replace something with something else. However, it is important, we believe, that this exhibition does not wind up being a one-dimensional critique on an existing situation, but questions our desire to have an impact on things. Our aim for this exhibition will be an acknowledgement of a dead-end; and confrontation, as you know, is often the last resort of one faced with such a dead-end.

continued on page 26

Actually, we have published a little book, titled *Suggestions for the Destruction of Athens*, which I would suggest to your readers. It is in effect a guide for the exhibition concept, and as clear an indication as possible for our perception of the 'political.' As for the contemporary identity of Athens, I think it is at stake no matter what we do. And I would not even begin to envision a whole community's interpretation of anything.

To Director Marieke Van Hal

Over the last decade, biennials have been mushrooming around the globe. There has been much talk and criticism about the biennialization of the art world, yet here we are anticipating the Destroy Athens Biennial in 2007. In your opinion can this tactical "franchise" serve the needs of the contemporary Greek art community? Could we be going through the fading stages of the fad and if so could potentially Destroy Athens also make its mark as one of "The Last of the Biennialized?"

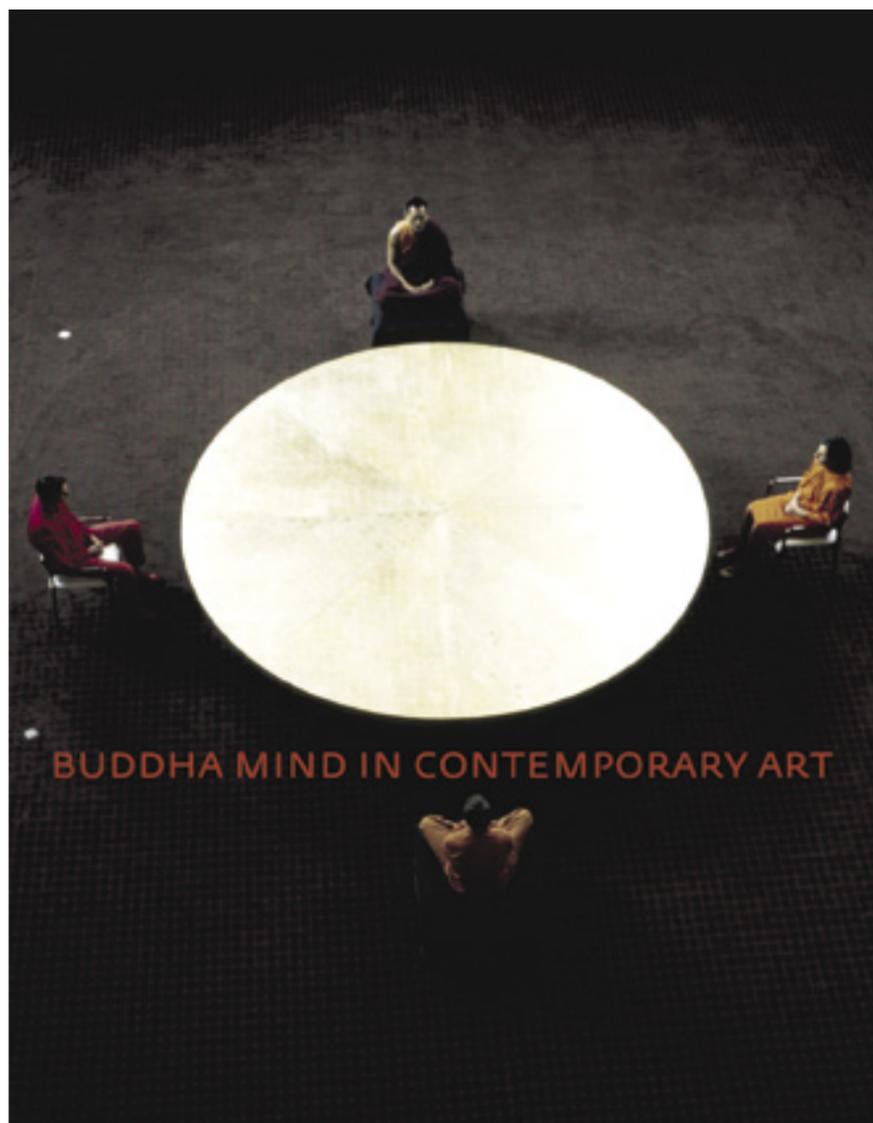
The three curators Xenia Kalpaktsoglou, Poka-Yio and Augustine Zenakos, who initiated the Athens Biennial, as well as myself, are very much aware of the expanding landscape of biennials around the world, and as far as this format or model is concerned, we're not pretending to have invented the wheel. Actually, I believe that the biennial is a formula that has proven to work very well, understanding that some have better quality and are more successful than others. For instance, the quality of the Istanbul Biennial and the Sao Paulo Biennial has increased substantially over the years and they are both very well respected internationally. To me, it is completely valid to have biennials operating in so many cities worldwide, as I like to regard them more as the museums of the 21st century. It's clear now that a biennial fulfills the needs of contemporary artistic production by operating as an efficient mechanism for linking local

scenes with global concerns. It is also capable of addressing important international socio-political issues and it draws attention to the shifting central-peripheral dynamic. No one questions the reasons why every respectable city has a museum for contemporary art, so why all this fuss? Since Greece doesn't have so many institutions for contemporary art, I regard the very initiative of starting up a biennial in Athens as very important. It creates a new platform for critical discourse, which can only benefit the contemporary art community. **BP**

¹ Condensed personal Greek-art-gap remedies: a. To read the now, you've got to know the past, and Denys Zacharopoulos' essay in Leonidas Beltsios Collection catalog entitled, *The Pioneers* puts Greek art of the second half of the 20th century in social, political, and economic context. (Published by futura, available in Greek) b. The new millennium was marked with the shift in focus to contemporary art by the futura publishing house (www.futura.gr). As of right now, one hundred and forty-five books are available from futura, many of which are bilingual. c. a. the athens contemporary art review (<http://www.athensartreview.org>) "a. is a monthly, online, bilingual magazine that showcases essays on contemporary art, reviews of exhibitions in Athens, interviews and book reviews. a. is attempting to document the contemporary art scene in Athens and to produce critical discourse, thus feeding the ongoing public discussion." (a. information taken from the official website of the publication for your reference) I highly recommend you subscribe to this online publication.

A Conversation with Mary Jane Jacob

by Juan William Chávez



Ulay and Abramovic, *Nightsea Crossing—Conjunction*, 1983
(Front Cover of *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*)

Mary Jane Jacob is an independent curator and is also Chair and Professor of Sculpture at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has created over 50 exhibitions, commissioned over 100 artists' projects, and was Chief curator of MCA/Chicago and MoCA/Los Angeles. For more information on Mary Jane Jacob you can visit her web site at www.maryjanejacob.org. The following interview was conducted via email.

Juan William Chávez At what point did you know you wanted to be a curator and when did you want to become an independent curator?

Mary Jane Jacob "Curator" wasn't in my vocabulary until I got to grad school, but

early on in my high school years I knew I wanted to work in art. I was lucky enough to grow up at the edge of Manhattan, so my playground was museums, especially MoMA. At that time the omnipresence of museums and their sense of open access seemed normal, part of everyday experience. By college I decided to locate my art history expertise training in museums rather than an academic setting, so pursued "museum studies," as it was called. (There weren't programs solely devoted to curating because in the mid-1970s museums were still the only real institutional players in the field of exhibitions and collections, so that made sense.)

I became an independent curator in 1990 for the same reason I started down this path:

because art is most powerful as part of the everyday experience. When I began, museums were free...or at least not so expensive; as part of people's lives, they were available as places of knowledge, contemplation, or refuge. During the 15 years I worked in museums they saw a kind of renaissance, but with this came greater commercialization, higher admission costs, accelerated entertainment factors, and a struggle of public and private values. As an independent curator, I worked in but at the edges of institutions where there was some distance and flexibility. There I could undertake artists' projects and exhibitions that at once critiqued these developments while seeking to advance art and ideas, curatorial and public practices.

J.W.C. The "mind of don't know" is a recurring concept in your work. What sparked your initial interest in the concept and how did you begin to apply it to your practice?

M.J.J. I first heard this phrase in 2001 from a Buddhist priest, Yvonne Rand, who was a consultant for the "Awake: Art, Buddhism, and the Dimensions of Consciousness" research project I co-organized with Jackie Baas (this embraced a range of museums exhibitions and programs, and led to the book *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art* that I co-edited with Jackie).

Well, when I heard this phrase, I immediately thought, "yes, this is it. Tell me more," — this sounded so true to my experience.

During the previous decade, with each undertaking, I'd been allowing the curatorial process to unfold: simultaneously emerging or revealing itself to me, while also cultivating or provoking it. This process was often open for criticism from institutional employees or prospective funders as being "too organic," "too loose," and "not fully defined." But this was never an issue with the artists I engaged and I came to feel my practice was parallel to the artist's (though not the same as the artist's — unlike some curators, I am very clear that I am not an artist). Curating was an ongoing dialogue, criss-crossing processes of creativity and production. "Mind of don't know" values the intuition as a form of knowledge and allows it to come to the surface. It accepts that discovery will happen in the process of carrying out something, and if we stay open — in the mind of don't know — we can arrive at places we would not otherwise. So, it is a methodology that allows for creative collaboration to take its course

—which I believe are the ways of working I have developed in my practice as an independent curator.

J.W.C. In your opinion how has the Artist's practice evolved over the last fifteen years?

M.J.J. Speaking from the perspective of The School of the Art Institute of Chicago — any art school can be a barometer of change — I see artists as more involved in the world. They are not only political or social or cultural critics representing their points of view, but seeking to become real agents of change, part of communities and protagonists in the public realm, also undertaking research, applying their knowledge, and joining with those in other fields to address problems in the world. Maybe this is because the world itself has eroded so much in the past few years. But artists are also reaffirming that artworks are needed in the world, that we need aesthetic experiences in our lives. Those in and out of the art world appreciate the value of art on many different levels and, so, various terrains are being opened up by and for artists.

J.W.C. How do you see your curatorial practice evolving in the next 5 years?

M.J.J. Ironically, I am working in an academic setting — just the place I had decided was not for me when I was a grad student. Yet here I am able to question the public edge of art schools: understanding the power and importance of what art can do, how do we teach students to consider art's interface with audience; taking advantage of the freedom of the academy yet not becoming isolated or out of touch with the public, how do we present art and ideas to ourselves and also to others. This seems so essential since art itself must have a public to be.

I can't answer exactly this challenging question but I do foresee using my experience with exhibitions to work with artists and art students in other ways and, if in the process, we find new and better ways for art and artists to be a part of the everyday, that would be great. I "don't know" what that is yet, but it is what I am doing now and will be doing for some time to come. **BP**

A closer look at St. Louis Contemporary Art: Interview with Shannon Fitzgerald

by Georgia Kotretsos



photo: Helene Binet



photo: Helene Binet

Since 2003, the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis has been located at the Grand Center Creative and Cultural District in midtown. It was initially founded by a group of civic, cultural, and educational leaders in 1980 at the Mississippi riverfront. Brad Cloepfil has molded concrete to serve as the backdrop for contemporary art in a way that makes one think the building was always at the corner of Spring and Washington Avenue. The Contemporary serves and leads the local art community. Since 2003 it has set the tone of contemporary art in St. Louis by showing local, national and international artists. Shannon Fitzgerald, chief curator at the time of this interview, is the one to talk to about contemporary art in St. Louis.

Georgia Kotretsos First encounters do count a great deal. I first visited the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis when it opened on Washington Boulevard with the exhibition, *A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad*. Since, then I've come back several times. In your opinion do you think the opening of the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis in 2003 at its current location marked the beginning of St. Louis' recent Art history?

Shannon Fitzgerald Absolutely. The long awaited opening for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis was part of a larger 'new beginning' that was taking place in the city. As the only non-collecting museum in St. Louis dedicated solely to the art of our times, the opening of our museum and its inaugural show represented an important juncture in this institution's history and the visibility it would yield. Our inaugural exhibition was significant in several ways, but most importantly it marked a springboard to greater things that could be achieved in our new permanent location through the establishment of an expanded mission and with the incredible support from a dynamic Board of Directors and vital St. Louis community.

The thematic group exhibition *A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad* helped articulate our commitment to assisting artists produce new work and have them work and directly connect with our community (all 11 artists came to St. Louis – several as artists-in-residence). It made clear to the community that we would present art across all media—painting, installation, sculpture, performance art, and new media—while also being cognizant of timely themes in art and art history, and bring such explorations and ideas to the

fore. Lastly, for the accompanying catalog, we invited six internationally recognized scholars and writers to contribute new essays on the conceptual design and intellectual framework of the exhibition. This offered several important perspectives on the theme of authenticity that is still being debated in relation to Africa, the diaspora, and others.

Our subsequent exhibitions have demonstrated an equal focus on the work by emerging and mid-career artists through a series of internally organized solo exhibitions that were also international in scope. These include new work and exhibitions by Yun-Fei Ji, Polly Apfelbaum, Michael Lin, William Pope.L, Keith Piper, Ruby Osorio, Dzine, Alexander Ross, among others. This line of inquiry was also at the heart of presenting the work of Cindy Sherman, an icon of our time. It was important to position ourselves as a global contender in the international discourse and dialogue on contemporary art. We have established that. This, likewise, needed to be reflected in an increased dedication to producing new scholarship, which we have accomplished by expanding our publication record and international distribution.

Critical to being part of St. Louis' recent art history is that we regularly provide support to local and regional artists through exhibitions, financial awards, outreach, and access. The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis provides its constituents with the Visiting Critics and Curators Series, which includes free, public lectures and selected studio visits for regional artists by renowned art historians, curators, and critics. St. Louis-based artists have received gallery representation and invitations to exhibit in Chicago and New York through this program. One of the most important endeavors the Contemporary has recently created was the establishment of our Great Rivers Biennial, which has already demonstrated that opportunity has a lasting impact on artists. Our model is being looked at nationally and we are proud of that. Additionally, due to the overwhelming response to the call for work to participate in the Great Rivers Biennial, the Contemporary introduced the recent Contemporary Flat Files program. The Contemporary Flat Files was created through an open invitation to Midwest artists, residing in Missouri to submit small works on paper. Selections from these submissions have been exhibited in our gallery and continually provide a great resource. Local artists are integral to our community and our institution's success.

G.K. I'm under the impression that St. Louis has been bursting with new ideas and spaces/institutions since the beginning of the season and I hear there is more to follow. How do you explain this collective creative investment in the city? Why now?

S.F. It stems from an investment of community leadership coupled with a growing conviction on behalf of young artists and curators who are committed to making a career in St. Louis. To do so, a revived sense of community was necessary along with an ardent belief that such investment would be appreciated and supported. I think the ambition behind those leading the way has affected change. They have demonstrated that these new platforms are not only possible, but also rewarding. It has been inspirational for others and one can witness more artists supporting each other and openly engaging with each other, and that yields collaboration, which in turn creates greater visibility, interest, and ultimately support.

Without a remarkable regional economy for emerging artists, commercial spaces were not sufficient to present those artists just starting out—those without an established exhibition history or proven market viability. A new showcase needed to be created and that is what we have recently experienced. Such fresh cross-pollination of ideas reflects an interest and a necessity.

G.K. What do you think stood between St. Louis and its art potential in the past?

S.F. I am not sure of all the complexities but there seemed to be a disconnect among practitioners at all levels. For a city with a limited, but growing market for contemporary art, like other cities of its size and demographic, collaboration and community become critical. Part of the role of the emerging artist, recent graduate, and the hungry curator is to create opportunities, alternative spaces, one-night events, and to write about each other. That was being done only on rare occasions and it was unusual to me. There were pockets of activity, but they largely came and went. Many artists were working in isolation—purposefully and/or driven; it was not a St. Louis phenomenon. We are experiencing a positive momentum that I hope as a community we can sustain and make memorable and daring, to encourage an influx of artists and supporters for these initiatives.

G.K. Who is your audience in St. Louis?

S.F. Our audience is becoming increasingly diverse and is growing all the time. The majority of visitors have an interest in art and/or a curiosity about what contemporary art is. We are located in midtown, an area known as the Grand Center Creative and Cultural District that is experiencing revitalization. Our neighbors include institutions such as Saint Louis University, the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, the Fox Theatre, Grandel Theater, Sheldon Concert Hall and Galleries, Cardinal Ritter College Prep, KETC/Channel 9, and the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, most of which offer programs in both the visual and performance arts. Increased partnerships with other local organizations provide the Contemporary with opportunities to attract new visitors. The Museum replaced a once-vacant corner and abandoned office building, which has helped transform the area. By providing new critical daytime programming we continue to draw more people not only to the museum but to the area. This is exciting to watch unfold.

G.K. Have you identified an art gap that needs to be filled in the city?

S.F. The fortunate thing is that the gap seems to have narrowed recently with the current influx of new non-profit alternative spaces and commercial galleries. I felt the space between the museum and commercial gallery space was a large gulf. This distance hurt artists dedicated to establishing a career and life in St. Louis. More opportunities for short-term projects even in temporary spaces help to bridge such a gap. This is changing, the most significant impetus were the spaces on Cherokee; they were the pioneers and survived when interest was minimal.

G.K. What should an art visitor from out of state or abroad know before coming to visit St. Louis?

S.F. A visit to the Arch is a must. And to know that St. Louis is a vital city with an engaged art scene that resonates and survives because of such an important supportive community. There is a legacy for supporting the visual arts in St. Louis and as such we have inherited great treasures and an appreciation for culture—particularly museum culture. St. Louis is, after all, located at the cross-roads, the quintessential indicator of new directions, adventure, and exploration. **BP**

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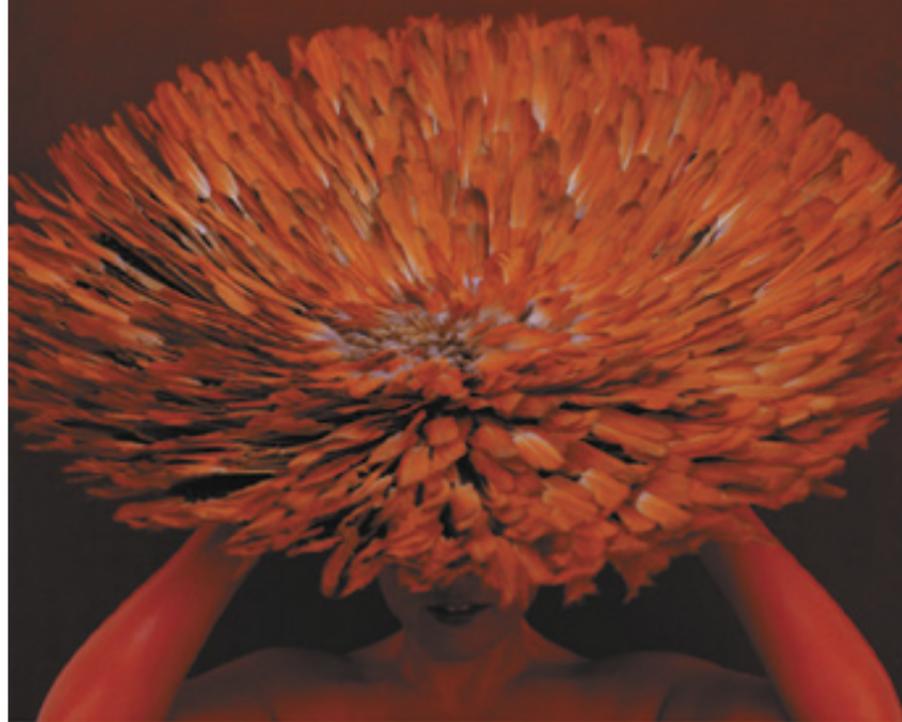
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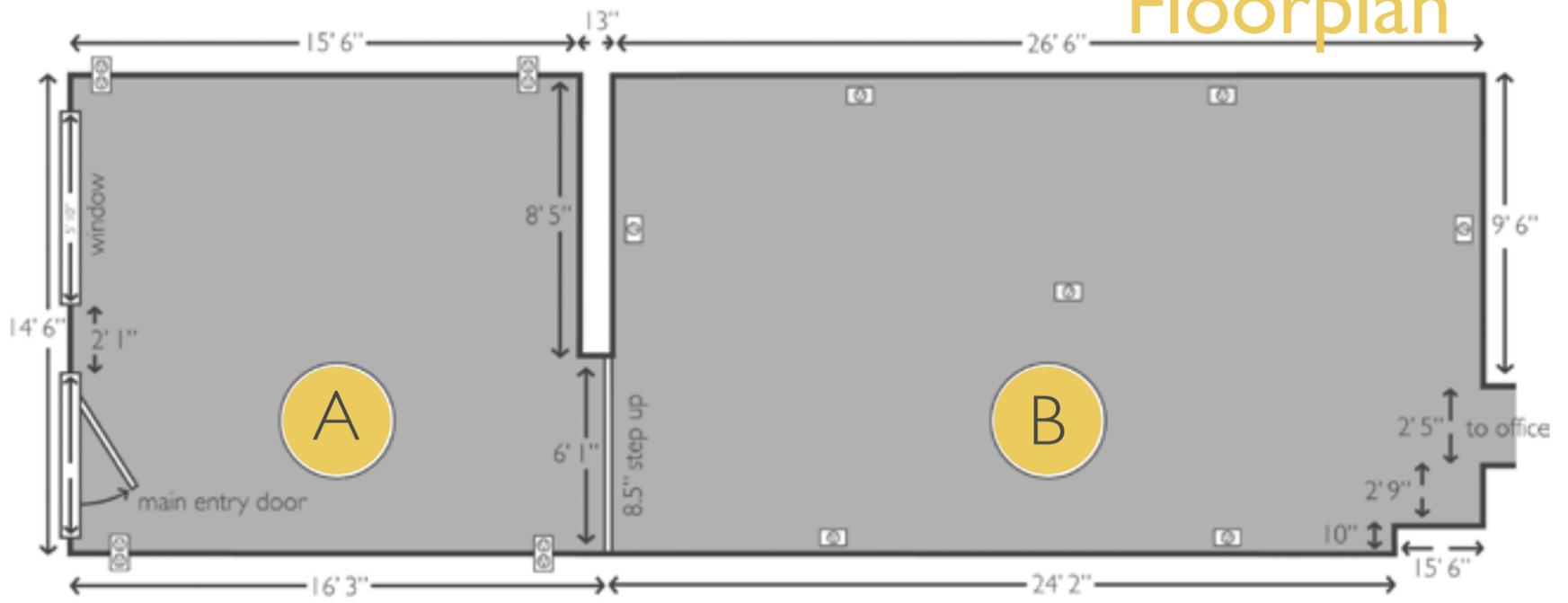
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