



Monsieur Roubignoles presents
The Kelsey Collection
Artforum 2004-2012

JOHN WATERS

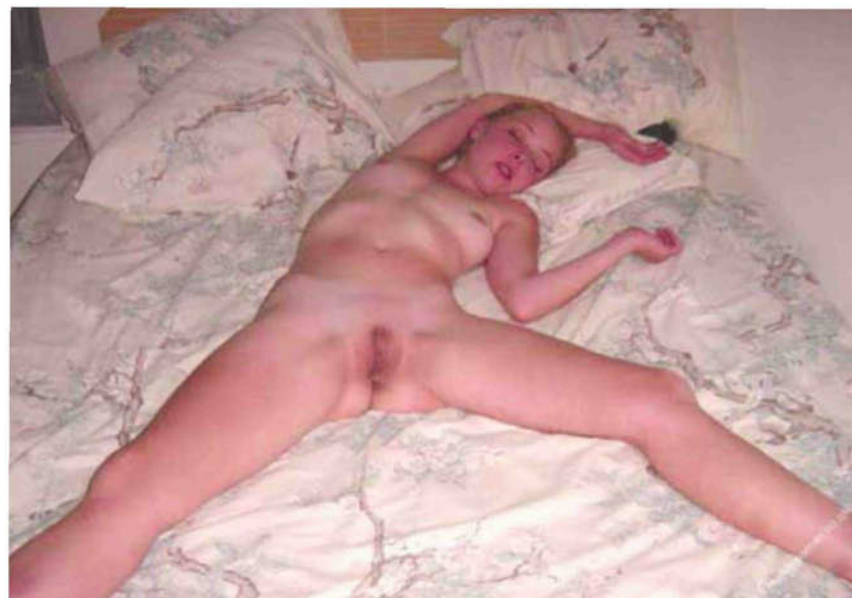
NEW MUSEUM OF
CONTEMPORARY ART, NEW YORK

JOHN KELSEY

In 1964, John Waters shot his first short film, *Hag in a Black Leather Jacket*, using shoplifted film stock and a Brownie 8 mm movie camera given to him by his grandmother for his seventeenth birthday. Thirty-three years later, while directing Edward Furlong and Christina Ricci in *Pecker*, he noticed that the tape marks his crew was using to position the actors on set looked a lot like abstract drawings, and decided to photograph and present them as art (*Mark #1–Mark #15*, 1998). Both *Hag* and the “Mark” series were included in “Change of Life,” Waters’s exhibition of photographic and sculptural work, curated by New Museum director Lisa Phillips and independent curator and critic Marvin Heiferman for the New Museum of Contemporary Art. But the most remarkable discovery here was what Waters calls his “little movies”—sequences of up to twenty-four still images, framed and legible from left to right like storyboards or image-sentences. First exhibited at Colin de Land’s American Fine Arts gallery in the mid-’90s and steadily evolving ever since, this body of work could be said to constitute a new, static, and silent kind of

a large part in the exhibition—the viewer suddenly collided with razor-sharp little blockbusters *Grace Kelly’s Elbows*, 1998, and *Lana Backwards*, 1994. These borderline photo-films are the results of his obsessive practice of snapping still frames off the screen while watching and rewatching his own and other directors’ movies on video. If such low-tech images seem to nod to the art of “antiphotographers” Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine, Waters’s spin on re-photography eschews these artists’ coolly critical flirtations with the “death of the author” to announce something even more exciting: the death of the audience. Each sequence of stills is a subtly terroristic act of cinema and a joyful subversion of spectatorship, perpetrated with the simplest and most available means: a videotape, a TV, and an ordinary still camera. As Waters subjects well-known and obscure Hollywood films and their stars to the adoring violence of his decontextualizations and juxtapositions—freezing, cropping, speeding up, recasting, and reorganizing cinema in the ultimate director’s cut—he rediscovered authorship in the lowly depths of fandom and consumption, unleashing a relentless, libidinated spectator-director.

Puke in the Cinema, 1998; *Retard*, 2000; and *Movie Star Junkie*, 1997, match-cut frames from a variety of films according to abject subject matter, generating crude and plotless star-studded epics. In fetish objects like *Sophia Loren Decapitated*, 1998, and *Farrah*, 2000—two sequences of X-Acto-knifed close-ups—Waters stalks and slashes



Opposite page: John Waters, *Return to Sender*, 2003, color photograph, 30 x 14". This page, above: John Waters, *Mark #12*, 1998, color photograph, 14 x 19 1/2". From the series "Mark #1–Mark #15," 1998. Below: John Waters, *Farrah* (detail), 2000, 8 color photographs with cut-outs, 9 1/2 x 88 1/2".

provocative of his little movies are those that gravitate toward the glitches, grain, and body of the degraded, reformatted film-to-tape image, excavating minor, even subliminal events like hairs in the gate, video lines, academy leader, etc. These material moments become the new stars of his drastic reedits, as do actresses’ elbows, insignificant details of costume, and credit sequences. *Ten Change-Over Marks*, 2003, isolates and enlarges the scratchy little circles that flash in the corner of film frames

stars and glamorous losers, Waters is drawn to the little deaths and breakdowns that happen in cinema; he pulls films from the grave and makes us notice their decomposed beauty.

Waters’s little movies are subversive rewritings of cinematic material liberated from its mise-en-scène so that it can tell its own story in its own time. By tearing cinema from the constraint of filmic time in this way, Waters causes the “veritable mutation of reading and its object, text or film”



moviemaking, one based on captured and edited fragments. More than debating how this activity relates to a recent history of art photography, we should ask instead what kind of cinema is being made here.

At the New Museum, after passing a framed grid of the scribbled-out, Twombly-esque index cards that Waters uses to organize his daily life (*308 Days*, 2003) as well as a photograph of the returned mail he’d addressed to various deceased, jailed, or relocated celebrities (*Return to Sender*, 2003)—this kind of anecdotal, autobiographical riff on the readymade also played

movie stars known for their impeccably controlled self-images. *Manson Copies Richard Gere*, 2000, is a concisely told two-frame makeover saga, while *Wicked Glinda*, 2003—a single still snapped at the precise moment *The Wizard of Oz* dissolves from the Good Witch to the Wicked Witch of the West—is the psychedelic debut of a dreamy new screen heroine.

Waters wields his VCR and his camera like a demented studio boss, reclaiming productions from their directors long after they’ve already been released, if not abandoned to history’s dustbins. The most

to cue the projectionist for reel changes. Echoing *Twelve Assholes and a Dirty Foot*, 1996—a sequence of raunchy porn stills displayed behind a drawn velvet curtain—these signals suddenly resemble celluloid anuses (there are plenty of other cases where Waters eroticizes the very material and mechanisms of cinematic production and distribution). *Despair*, 1995, groups melancholy instances of the film credit “Directed by Alan Smithee,” which ends up on botched Hollywood films whose real directors prefer to remain anonymous. In the same way that he’s fascinated by faded

that Roland Barthes proposed in his essay on Eisenstein’s film stills, “The Third Meaning.” In his photographic work, Waters activates movie desires that can’t be directly satisfied by making films in the normal, professional sense. It is filmmaking that luxuriates in a freedom from budgets, producers, and crew. Alone with only images, directing without company, conversation, or compromise, Waters comes closer to the perfect movie, the potential one he vaguely remembers or hallucinates in its fragments. □

John Kelsey is a New York-based writer and a member of the artists’ collective Bernadette Corporation.

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With a curatorial dream team and a sprawling conglomeration of twenty-five special projects, the first Moscow Biennale plugged the Russian capital into the circuit of destination exhibitions rapidly proliferating around the globe. Artforum's JOHN KELSEY surveys the scene and parses its ambiguous relationship to that consensus we call "contemporary."

I am not complaining about anything and I like everything here, although I have never been here and know nothing about this place.

—COLLECTIVE ACTION GROUP, SLOGAN '77, 1977

Moscow mixes the surface energies of Las Vegas with pages from Kafka's *Castle*. On the one hand, there is actual wildness and popular images of it: flashy casinos and raging discos, quasi-legal prostitution (the age of consent only sixteen), ever-flowing vodka, and the massive influx of luxury goods (Dior, Chanel, a block-long Rolex billboard across from Red Square), in addition to Russia's mythic oligarchs and gangsters, who put our versions of these figures to shame as far as bling, badness, and influence go. On the other hand, there are unsmiling uniforms at the front desk, overly complex and time-consuming procedures in place of our cheery service economy's efficiency, high prices and police hassles, all of which make the usual touristic aspect of a biennial so awkward and dysfunctional here. Add to this the living memory of a successful revolution turned bad, not quite dormant under fresh layers of rampant renovation and commercialism, and one gets a high-speed, high-contrast montage of nows and thens, a potent and disorienting cocktail for outsiders. In Moscow, the pasted-on newness of contemporary images—whether by artists or by multinational corporations—pops and speeds all the more intensely against medieval and Soviet architectures, broadcasting the city's real-time sprint out of the past into a giddy, ineluctable abstraction.

So how does an international biennial arrive in a context like this? Last-minute, or not at all. Curatorial hirings and firings, venue changes, and all kinds of conspiracy theories and media controversies preceded the event. Artists complained about absurd degrees of bureaucracy, three-day waits for a screwdriver. Sam Durant's work was stuck in customs. Videos by John Bock and others, meant to be projected in a subway station, didn't seem to be functioning. There was no way to see all the art on the schedule with the constant traffic jams and security measures at each venue. Most ominous of all was the disappearance of one of the biennial's Dutch installation specialists, last seen in the presence of two local girls at

a nightclub and later found robbed, slashed, and almost frozen to death on the outskirts of the city. None of this, however, could stop the 1 Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art. At 6 PM on January 27, the Beryozka Vodka blondes were in the lobby passing out free shots; most of the art was up and running; the crowds were pushing in; the thing was obviously happening.

The biggest international art event ever in Russia, the 1 Moscow Biennale hit the capital like sudden weather—a contemporary warm front coming in from the West to meet an ice-bound pocket of local product, especially the preperestroika underground art of the '60s through the '80s, which was seen in these few days by its largest audience ever. The constant snow plus the minus-twenty-degree-Celsius temperatures provided a white wall more extreme than that of any Chelsea gallery, and against this backdrop, Moscow was officially and ceremoniously curated into contemporary existence. This magic was performed with the help of an imported team of five European curator-stars—Daniel Birnbaum (director of Frankfurt's Städtelschule), Iara Boubnova (cocurator of Manifesta 4), Nicolas Bourriaud (curator of the Venice Biennale's Aperto '93 and codirector of Paris's Palais de Tokyo), Rosa



Left: Members of artist collective Gelatin with Beryozka Vodka girls, Moscow, 2005. Photo: John Kelsey.

Right: Oleg Kulik, *Armadillo for Your Show*, 2003. Performance view, Tate Modern, London.

Martínez (cocurator of the next Venice Biennale), and Hans-Ulrich Obrist (co-organizer of "Utopia Station" and curator of contemporary art at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris)—along with a local coordinating curator, former underground impresario and current deputy director of the State Centre for Museums and Exhibitions Rosizo, Joseph Backstein.

If we had something like a cultural forecasting device, the capitalist front driving the biennial into Russia might be visualized as dense, fast-moving clouds originating in places where most *Artforum* readers live and proliferating as a biennial system that continuously pushes the climate we call "contemporary" across the shrinking globe. Such a



Micol Assaël, *Sleeplessness*, 2003/2005. Installation view, Lenin Museum, Moscow, 2005.

device might also picture the clear, low-pressure zone of Putin-era Moscow, its newly organized wealth and rising art-collector class, and all the no-longer-outlawed local creativity that has nowhere else to go these days but out into the expanding global market. So, from certain very Moscow-centric circles, there was an urgent demand for this event. In a renovated Manhattan-style loft, at a party hosted by the recently formed Club of Contemporary Art Collectors, local investors, gallerists, and artists echoed Moscow's need for this injection of young art from abroad (and the business and attention that come with it). It was said that it was in the interests of certain officials, dealers, and organizers of the event that local artists experience this new weather in order to invigorate and update their own



Mikhaïl Romm, *Lenin Is Alive*, 1958, still from a black-and-white digital video projection transferred from 35 mm film, 26 minutes.

production and thereby make it more internationally integrated and investment worthy. And then there's the city's basic, metaphysical need to make itself visible in this world—a need for a cultural equivalent of the Olympic Games—expressed in optimistic press releases issued by the Ministry of Culture that sold the event as a bold, government-sponsored initiative to modernize the national culture and self-image by opening up a dialogue with international contemporary art.

Along with the biennial's cryptic title, "Dialectics of Hope," the promise of *the contemporary* hung over Moscow like a riddle waiting to be solved. The European curators gave us one version (the main event: forty-one artists from twenty-three countries), while local curators presented another (more than twenty-five special projects showcasing Russian art throughout the city). This encounter between young but mostly known artists—many already well traveled on the international biennial circuit and frequently exposed in magazines like this one—and entire floors in nearby venues devoted to Russian artists (familiar only to their peers and to a few specialists of the region) introduced an unexpected topological twist to the notion of the contemporary. With all the international consensus and expertise backing the biennial's imported product (and the global biennial itself as a format for representing an international today), it would be too much to say that the function of contemporary art was contested or seriously cast in doubt here. But in this particular context its status appeared less clear, less fixed, and this effect—for me, at least—was the dominant product of

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How can we differentiate between a sanctioned and timely aesthetic gesture and the potential threat of a more viral antiaesthetic, and at what point do our institutional antibodies decide their host has been infected? At this groundbreaking biennial, the contemporary moment seemed crowded with impostors.

graphic design—and Kulik's *Madonna with Children*, 2004—a readymade city bus stop and vitrine, which instead of the usual advertising image displays a faux fashion photograph of a Chechen suicide bomber (Madonna) strapped with explosives (children). Employing slick promotional strategies in the service of shock tactics (and vice versa), such works take direct aim at social issues that the biennial would probably prefer to smooth over, but in the end they mostly declare and illustrate their intentions, making us wonder whether there might be something less readily consumable, something like a "Russia 3" around the next corner.

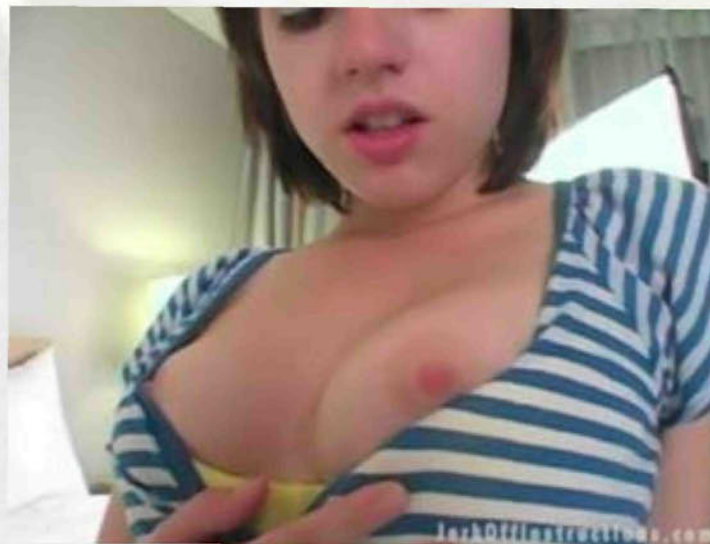
Why did I lie to myself that I had never been here and knew nothing about this place? Actually here is just like everywhere. Only one feels it more sharply and misunderstands it more deeply.

—COLLECTIVE ACTION GROUP,
SLOGAN '78, 1978

In Moscow, there was a constant refrain among visiting curators and journalists that contemporary Russian art is "derivative," "nothing new," or even the occasional "looks like an SVA graduation show." Glancing through a local review of the international main event, however, one might hear a Muscovite writer critiquing the imported art for its "sleazy, low-format appearance" and "poor communicative abilities." Beyond their simple reflection of differences in taste, such statements can also be read as symptoms of a lingering incommensurability, even as a positive sign that the biennial's format is not its only message and that, no matter how neutralizing (or utopian) the imaging of a global contemporary may be, it can still provoke gut-level reactions, clashing sensibilities, and debates over image, form, and strategy.

In a 2003 catalogue essay local curator and critic Constantin Bokhorov writes that Russian artists really don't care about being original or providing the world with any special knowledge. Flipping through his text on my way to another opening, I began to imagine that the secret genius of the Russian artist might be to clown the contemporary, to mimic or pirate it. If we assume that the status of international contemporary art relies to a large extent on both financial investment and institutional legitimization, perhaps a "derivative" contemporary practice could be a kind of black-market tactic, a dispersion strategy, a

termitelike hollowing out from within of the values and representations that the international biennial system tends to affirm. There may be a fine line between the contemporary art of appropriation, for example, and a local art of pirating or fronting contemporary culture. How can we differentiate between a sanctioned and timely aesthetic gesture and the potential threat of a more viral antiaesthetic, and at what point do our institutional antibodies decide their host has been infected? At this groundbreaking biennial, the contemporary moment sometimes seemed crowded with impostors.



Yevgeniy Fiks, *Hacker's Cubicle*, 2004, still from a two-channel digital video installation.



Joanna Malinowska, *Untitled*, 2002/2004, stills from a seven-channel video installation.



Left: Anton Ginzburg, *totemdoppelganger*, 2004, color photograph, 60½ x 39".

Right: AES+F, *Action Half-Life (AHL)*, 2003–2005, inkjet print on canvas, 58½ x 73½".

"Post-Diasporas" was an exhibition featuring Russian- and Eastern European-born artists currently living in places like Paris and New York. All the work engaged multicultural issues such as translating national and local identity in a global context, border crossings, etc. There was Daniel Bozhkov's hysterical overconsumption of IKEA culture and a project by Joanna Malinowska in which the artist assumed the identity of a Polish cleaning woman in Manhattan, exchanging her performance of an immigrant stereotype for (equally stereotypical) highbrow cultural services from her clients (philosophy lessons, piano recitals, etc.). Yevgeniy Fiks's two-channel video installation *Hacker's Cubicle*, 2004, presented interviews with prisoners enrolled in a Rikers Island computer-programming class alongside footage of the "cubicle," a combination computer workstation/prison cell, a sort of digital crime-and-punishment apparatus. This work continued the artist's ongoing exploration of what he has described as an unconscious symbiotic relationship between immigrant computer programmers pursuing their dreams in corporate America and the burgeoning criminal cyber-underground of provincial Russia. Taken as a metaphor for the local artist operating in a global market today, the anonymous hacker suggests an ambiguous aesthetic that's indifferent to intellectual property, formally deceptive, parasitic in relation to originality, impossible to trace but no less proficient or industrious than its host.

If posing, pirating, and other mimetic tactics are so operative in Russia today (media piracy is rampant here), and if such processes put pressure not only on recent official images of national identity but also on the mechanisms by which contemporary art is globally distributed, then isn't it possible that an "unoriginal" Russian version of international art in fact harbors a potential subversion of the culture market that's poised to absorb it? In a world where everything is just as "contemporary" as everything else, questions of legitimacy and authenticity might have to give way to new, more complex ideas of duplicitous cohabitation or perhaps antagonistic worlds. At the Moscow Biennale, these ideas seemed to be right there on the table, blending in with everything else.

And if a group exhibition like "Gender Trouble," for example, can be summarily dismissed by an American journalist with "Haven't we been here already?" I wasn't sure how to dismiss the blindfolded, stark-naked performance artist with a video camera taped to her head who cornered me and other random spectators at the packed opening, blindly groping and filming us at the same time. When *was* this contemporary, and where was this *now*? Yes, there was something a bit familiar about it, maybe early-'90s SVA via '70s shades of Valie Export. Still, I suddenly had the feeling that here, for a fleeting moment, a discrepancy between simultaneous contemporaries was not merely possible but literally embodied. In Moscow, examples of "legitimate" contemporary art were vastly outnumbered by works that no European curator would give a second glance, and the



Valery and Rimma Gertovins, *Homo Sapiens*, 1976, black-and-white photograph.



TOTART (Abalakova & Zhigalov), *White Globe*, n.d., color photograph, 7 1/2 x 11 1/2.



View of "Spring Apartment Exhibitions," Leonid Sokov's studio, Moscow, 1976. Photo: Valentin Serov.

In Moscow, examples of "legitimate" contemporary art were vastly outnumbered by works that no European curator would give a second glance, and the real question wasn't which version was most adequate or timely but how we might think about this discrepant simultaneity in a less-neutralizing, less-programmed way.



John Kelsey

A NEW YORK-BASED ARTIST AND WRITER, JOHN KELSEY IS A MEMBER OF BERNADETTE CORPORATION AND CODIRECTOR OF REENA SPALLINGS, NEW YORK.

1 HURRICANE KATRINA Ask Stockhausen. As if timed for the opening of the Whitney's Robert Smithson retrospective, this was arguably less a natural disaster than a case of Land art gone horribly wrong. An environmental and political tragedy of Spielbergian proportions, Katrina produced images of the sort of "naked life" we'd previously only identified with non-sites like Iraq. The drowned ghetto, the shooting of homeless looters, the police suicides, the forced evacuations, the superdomes filled with refugees—these are visions we can only try to erase. For some reason it was impossible not to imagine the hurricane as a terrorist act. And I guess it was—Made in USA.

2 RIOT THE BAR (BARD COLLEGE, ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON, NY) A sort of antimonument to the Stonewall riots of 1969, *RIOT THE BAR* was a nightly drinking party and chaotic program of music, dancing, bonfires, talks, games, etc., culminating in the bar being auctioned off and then promptly destroyed in a nearby field. This week-long collaboration between Bard summer MFA students and faculty was conceived and "choreographed" by performance artist Ei Arakawa, who was inspired by his memory of a failed gay pride march in Tokyo and subsequent encounter with the banality of official gay culture in New York. Nothing remains but the zine Arakawa assembled to document the event: "It took some years to realize that WE ARE EVERYWHERE. Aren't you tired of this motto? Yes, you are . . . welcome to RIOT THE BAR."

3 POOR THEATER The Wooster Group's *Poor Theater* appropriated, cunningly travestied, and thereby exorcized various demons that have long possessed its director: Jerzy Grotowski's legendary experimental theater in Poland, avant-garde choreographer William Forsythe, Max Ernst, and Hollywood westerns. Involving fewer pyrotechnics than usual, the Group accomplished its magic with little more than bodies and language. Absorbing and then suddenly discarding Grotowski's hard-core physical exercises, alternating between Polish and English, playing back the tape-recorded commen-

tary of a disappointed theater critic, launching into delirious danced monologues, and finally disappearing under the floorboards, *Poor Theater* was stripped-down for speed and as astonishing as anything Liz LeCompte and company have ever done.

4 THE READYMADE ARTIST How should we measure our distance from the avant-garde role models we learned about in school? How can we begin to treat the subjective whateverness of the contemporary artist? Coined by the Paris-based art collective Claire Fontaine, the term "readymade artist" seems perfectly adjusted to a situation where something like the "artist's life" no longer seems possible. No longer prophetic or revolutionary but professional and post-everything, we have no influence over the cultural apparatus that employs us, still less over its political function. Overexposed, inflated, instrumentalized beyond recognition, imposters in our own styles, miraculously outlasting our own purpose, as readymade artists we can begin to surpass our shared incompetence only by confronting the fact that contemporary art is no longer destined to act directly on reality.

5 MY LIFE IN CIA: A CHRONICLE OF 1973 (DALKEY ARCHIVE PRESS) Harry Mathews's new novel is based on true events from his life in Paris during the year 1973, when he joined the experimental literary group Oulipo and unwittingly earned a reputation as an undercover CIA agent. Rather than deny his "true" profession (his repeated denials only made others more suspicious), Mathews decided to assume this new identity and play it to the hilt. All authors are imposters anyway. Mathews reinvents the memoir and himself by applying the language games he invented (with fellow Oulipians Georges Perec and Raymond Queneau) both to his experience of everyday life and to its recollection. *My Life in CIA* is a manual for escaping bourgeois literature through bourgeois literature, an autobiographical thriller packed with "evasive tactics," paranoia, fine wines, and false bottoms.

6 GALERIE MEERRETTICH (BERLIN) Artist Josef Strau curates this tiny glass "pavilion" (or giant vitrine) near Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz in Berlin. It is always there and almost always closed (except for openings). I was there one night in June for a live rooftop performance: Paulina Olowaska and two friends used their bodies to spell out poems by Strau and others.

7 "JACQUELINE HUMPHRIES: BLACK LIGHT PAINTINGS" (NYEHAUS, NEW YORK) The most memorable painting show in New York this year was Humphries's tripped-out, daringly queasy exhibition of "Black Light Paintings" and painted light boxes. Her plugged-in works literally heated up the darkened rooms like ovens and melted down the boundary between painterly abstraction and sweaty nightclub decor.

8 THE ACCIDENT OF ART (SEMIOTEXT(E)) The latest in a series of dialogues between Sylvère Lotringer and Paul Virilio that began with *Pure War* in 1983, *The Accident of Art* attempts to diagnose the crisis of aesthetics in the age of the cruise missile and the implant. Known for his extreme theories on speed and disappearance, Virilio claims that if contemporary art continues to deny the missing ground beneath its feet it will soon be past the point of producing anything worthwhile. Lotringer believes the crash has already happened, saying that art's proliferating market is nothing but camouflage for its own postmortem condition. Virilio replies that an accident is not the same as the end of art: There's still hope if art can live up to its own catastrophic destiny.

9 WAR OF THE WORLDS 9/11 revisited as multimillion-dollar B movie, embodied by unstoppable acting-machine Tom Cruise.

10 COCAINE KATE
Destroy your favorite celebrity with a cell phone. □

1. Satellite view of Hurricane Katrina, August 29, 2005. 2. View of *RIOT THE BAR*, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, 2005. 3. The Wooster Group, *Poor Theater*, 2005. Performance view, The Performing Garage, New York, 2005. Photo: Paula Court. 5. Harry Mathews, *My Life in CIA: A Chronicle of 1973* (Dalkey Archive Press, 2005). 6. Paulina Olowaska, *Alphabet*, 2005. Performance view, Galerie Meerrrettich, Berlin, 2005. 7. Jacqueline Humphries, *Clockwork Lemon*, 2005, mixed media, 72 x 84". 8. Sylvère Lotringer and Paul Virilio, *The Accident of Art* (Semiotext(e), 2005). 9. Steven Spielberg, *War of the Worlds*, 2005, still from a color film in 35 mm, 116 minutes. 10. Cover of *The Daily Mirror*, September 15, 2005. Kate Moss.



Preview



Left: Isabell Heimerdinger, *Interior 34*, 2000, color photograph, 47 1/4 x 63". From "Cinema Like Never Before." Right: Marc Camille Chaimowicz, *Celebration? Realife Revisited*, 1972/2000/2002. Installation view, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, 2003. Photo: FBM Studio.

GENEVA

Steven Parrino

MUSÉE D'ART MODERNE
ET CONTEMPORAIN

February 21–May 14

Curated by Fabrice Stroun

For Steven Parrino, the making of art in New York was—like life in the city itself—an unremitting, unsentimental negotiation between production and destruction. Taking as many cues from Warhol as he did from experimental music, this post-painter wrenched canvases off their stretchers, twisting them into glossy vortices, and pummeled smooth Sheetrock panels with a sledgehammer. What's most American in Parrino's work are its automatic procedures, its blackouts, and its conceptual relationship with B-horror movies, underground comics, and noise. This retrospective includes more than two hundred works, ranging from paintings, drawings, and photographs that date from the artist's student years and his involvement with the Nature Morte gallery in the East Village to the collaborative film and music projects that preceded his fatal motorcycle accident in 2005. —John Kelsey

The Young Girl's pacific nature caught my attention at a reading group cloistered in its enthusiasm for the hackneyed 'becoming.' A breeze wafted between the columns of contemporary isolation, and I found that by focussing on her pillowy cheeks I could augment an erection, enflame it even, in the feckless seesawing motions of the multitude as they tranced out to interpretation.

In *Pornografia* Witold Gombrowicz has the narrator muse that, "All situations in the world are figures," as he witnesses two youth's perform a vacuous intimacy. He dignifies his imaginary sense of injustice by using a boy who he's chosen to be an interloper in the couple's romance, and bring him into dialogue with the deeper meanings of his surroundings. Written 23 years after *Ferdydurke*, Gombrowicz's later novel disavows his earlier ironic distance to immaturity. Preferring the bowels to the mask, he "fabricates secretly... a world made out of the refuse of a higher world of culture, a domain of trash... inadmissible passions... a secondary domain of compensation." That is to say pornography.

Interning for an online arts and literature magazine, le dernier cri with middle-management and tablet gazing illuminati, the girl wonders if she hangs together suitably. This not being her first foray into personal display she intuits that affirming (to work for) the stream of horizontal information that defines her non-paying employer's value demands donning an existential freshness. As well the next series of intrigues: a new job, lover, town, extracurricular activity.

She is a seductive mix of naive certainty, spherical contemplation, and wit. A timeless figure whose grace parcels out a high currency to that which she deems consumption worthy. Hatched from the century of the self she's in the black lodge of *Renn Fayre*, the child of bourgeois moderation, receiving marching orders to find herself in the fragments of her immediate surroundings.

An affaire will certainly entail a descent into a land spacious with magazine covers and referentiality. A recurrent and rich hell where fantasies of her identity will haunt my attention.

Inviting a passionate obsession I'd peruse the young girl's photos on Facebook until they became a reservoir of familiar scenes. Clicking through I'd invest these captured moments with a panoply of libidinous significance. She is among her friends posing in slips at a clearing in a forest, a close-up of trousers with a DIY patch, she was in a photo booth, on a junk raft, genuinely shocked at a party, sitting on gravel with arms wrapped around her legs pensively remote in a crowd of peers. With the acuity with which wasps build nests with tree dust and saliva, I was constructing paper-thin walls out of the reflection of her image. *Les miroirs sont les portes par lesquelles la Mort va et vient.* And our visits together were mounting in intensity and frequency.

Art of the Possible

FULVIA CARNEVALE AND JOHN KELSEY IN CONVERSATION WITH JACQUES RANCIÈRE



Chris Marker, *untitled (Paris, April 2006)*, black-and-white digital image, dimensions variable. From the series "The Revenge of the Eye," 2006.

FULVIA CARNEVALE: Your work has taken a very particular trajectory. It starts with archival research on workers' struggles and the utopias of the nineteenth century and ends up in the field of contemporary art, aesthetics, and cinema. Do you see ruptures or continuity on your philosophical path?

JACQUES RANCIÈRE: I'm not a philosopher who has gone from politics to aesthetics, from liberation movements of the past to contemporary art. I have always sought to contest globalizing thought that relies on the presupposition of a historical necessity. In the 1970s I conducted research in early-nineteenth-century workers' archives* because the May '68 movement had highlighted the gap between Marxist theory and the complex history of the actual forms of workers' emancipation. I did it to counter the return to Marxist dogmatism on the one hand and, on the other, the liquidation of the very thought of workers' emancipation in the guise of a critique of Marxism. Later I weighed in on questions of contemporary art, because the interpretation of twentieth-century art movements also found itself implicated in this manipulation of history. Contemporary art was taken hostage in the operation of the "end of utopias," caught between so-called postmodern discourse, which proclaimed the "end of grand narratives," and the reversal of modernism itself, as modernist thinkers ended up polemicizing against modernism, ultimately condemning emancipatory art's utopias and their contribution to totalitarianism. It's always the same process: using defined periods and great historical ruptures to impose interdictions. Against this, my work has been the same, whether dealing with labor's past or art's present: to break down the great divisions—science and ideology, high culture and popular culture, representation and the unrepresentable, the modern and the postmodern, etc.—to contrast so-called historical necessity with a topography of the configuration of possibilities, a perception of the multiple alterations and displacements

that make up forms of political subjectivization and artistic invention. So I reexamined the dividing lines between the modern and postmodern, demonstrating, for example, that "abstract painting" was invented not as a manifestation of art's autonomy but in the context of a way of thinking of art as a fabricator of forms of life, that the intermingling of high art and popular culture was not a discovery of the 1960s but at the heart of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Nevertheless, what interests me more than politics or art is the way the boundaries defining certain practices as artistic or political are drawn and redrawn. This frees artistic and political creativity from the yoke of the great historical schemata that announce the great revolutions to come or that mourn the great revolutions past only to impose their proscriptions and their declarations of powerlessness on the present.

CARNEVALE: Has your work been received differently by the philosophical public, as it were, than by the contemporary art audience?

RANCIÈRE: Personally, I don't speak for philosophers. I don't speak for the members of a particular body or discipline. I write to shatter the boundaries that separate specialists—of philosophy, art, social sciences, etc. I write for those who are also trying to tear down the walls between specialties and competences. This was the case with certain philosophers in the '60s and '70s, but it isn't the case today, and it is generally not what academia promotes. On the other hand, the contemporary art world may be more receptive, because contemporary art is, quintessentially, art defined by the erasure of medium specificity, indeed by the erasure of the visibility of art as a distinct practice. So what I have tried to theorize, under the name of the aesthetic regime of art, is the general form of this paradox wherein art was defined and institutionalized as a sphere of common experience at the very moment that the boundaries between what is and isn't art were being erased. Moreover, if my work has garnered special interest in contemporary art, it may be because I have tried to create a little breathing room with respect to the established divisions between modernity, the end of modernity, postmodernity, and so on. By complicating those relationships, by reestablishing an element of indeterminacy in the relationship between artistic production and political subjectivization, I have tried to free artists, curators, and other actors implicated in this world from the atmosphere of guilt wrought by the historical mission of art—a mission at which it would necessarily fail—or, alternatively, from a utopia of art that would have led to totalitarianism.

JOHN KELSEY: And was your idea of "equality"—the notion of the equality of intelligences that you put forward in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* [Le



This page: Jeremy Deller, *Battle of Orgreave*, 2001. Performance view, Orgreave, England, 2001. Opposite page, from top: Josephine Meckseper, *Aviso*, 2006, aluminum, mirror, Plexiglas, lights, glassware, scouring pad, glass ball, feather duster, metal stand, plastic frame, paper, lace, Aviso sign, jewelry, and acrylic painted hand sculpture, 89 x 46 x 18". Jean-Luc Moulène, *Objets de grève, la poêle des 17 de Manufrance*, 1999–2000, color photograph, 14 7/8 x 18 1/2".

Maitre ignorant (1987)]—a means of moving between early modern revolutionary discourses and the open question of subjective emancipation through contemporary art practices today?

RANCIÈRE: The very idea of Art—of the aesthetic experience—as defining a specific sphere of experience was born in the late eighteenth century under the banner of equality: the equality of all subjects, the definition of a form of judgment freed from the hierarchies of knowledge and those of social life. This equality that Kant, Schiller, and Hegel spoke of is neither equality in a general sense nor the equality of revolutionary movements. It is a certain sort of equality, a certain form of the neutralization of hierarchies that in other respects govern sensible existence. This aesthetic equality mingled with or confronted others. The idea of the equality of intelligences—which I borrowed from Joseph Jacotot, an early-nineteenth-century university professor whose largely forgotten educational philosophy inspired *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*—is a criterion that allows us to test the various thoughts and practices that lay claim to equality. It is clear, from this point of view, that art in and of itself is not liberating; it either is or isn't depending on the type of capacity it sets in motion, on the extent to which its nature is shareable or universalizable. For example, emancipation can't be expected from forms of art that presuppose the imbecility of the viewer while anticipating their precise effect on that viewer: for example, exhibitions

that capitalize on the denunciation of the "society of the spectacle" or of "consumer society"—bugbears that have already been denounced a hundred times—or those that want to make viewers "active" at all costs with the help of various gadgets borrowed from advertising, a desire predicated on the presupposition that the spectator is otherwise necessarily rendered "passive" solely by virtue of his looking. An art is emancipated and emancipating when it renounces the authority of the imposed message, the target audience, and the univocal mode of explicating the world, when, in other words, it stops *wanting* to emancipate us.

CARNEVALE: Let's return to the question of aesthetics and politics, terms paired with increasing frequency of late and with which your work is so closely associated. How did this odd couple become so fashionable?

RANCIÈRE: It's not a question of fashion. It represents a shift in the traditional formulation of the relationship between art and politics. In the time of politically engaged art, when critical models were clearly agreed upon, we took art and politics as two well-defined things, each in its own corner. But at the same time, we presupposed a trouble-free passage between an artistic mode of presentation and the determination to act; that is, we believed that the "raised consciousness" engendered by art—by the strangeness of an artistic form—would provoke political action. The artist

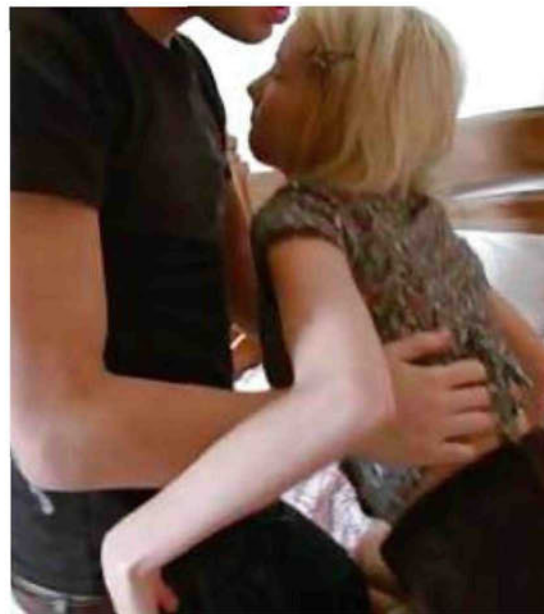
who presented the hidden contradictions of capitalism would mobilize minds and bodies for the struggle. The deduction was unsound, but that didn't matter so long as the explanatory schemata and the actual social movements were strong enough to anticipate its effects. That is no longer the case today. And the passage to the pairing of "aesthetics and politics" is a way of taking this into account: We no longer think of art as one independent sphere and politics as another, necessitating a privileged mediation between the two—a "critical awakening" or "raised consciousness." Instead, an artistic intervention can be political by modifying the visible, the ways of perceiving it and expressing it, of experiencing it as tolerable or intolerable. The effect of this modification is consequent on its articulation with other modifications in the fabric of the sensible. That's what "aesthetics" means: A work of art is defined as such by belonging to a certain regime of identification, a certain distribution of the visible, the sayable, and the possible. Politics, meanwhile, has an aesthetic dimension: It is a common landscape of the given and the possible, a changing landscape and not a series of acts that are the consequence of "forms of consciousness" acquired elsewhere. "Aesthetics" designates this interface. But this interface also signifies the loss of any relationship of cause and effect between "representations" considered artistic and "engagements" considered political. At the heart of what I call the aesthetic regime of art is the loss of any determinate relationship between a work and its audience, between its sensible presence and an effect that will be its natural end. Now we must examine the very terrain of the sensible on which artistic gestures shake up our modes of perception and on which political gestures redefine our capacities for action. I am neither a historian of art nor a philosopher of politics, but I work on this question: What landscape can one describe as the meeting place between artistic practice and political practice?

CARNEVALE: We have a diagnosis you might not agree with: As soon as there are political subjects that disappear from the field of actual politics, that become obsolete through a number of historical processes, they are recuperated in iconic form in contemporary art. Many contemporary artists and curators seem to share, for example, a certain nostalgia for the countercultures of earlier generations. We are thinking of all the things centered around the labor movement, for instance, not only in the work of Jeremy Deller but also in that of plenty of other artists who use this sort of iconic code—Rirkrit Tiravanija, Sam Durant, Paul Chan. How do you explain this process? Is it a delayed reaction of contemporary art in relation to the present or is it a form of absorption?

RANCIÈRE: We have to go beyond too simple a relationship between past and present, reality and icon. Your question presupposes a certain idea of the present: It accredits the idea that the working class has disappeared, that we can therefore speak of it nostalgically or in terms of kitsch imagery. Artists might reply that this is a vision borrowed from the dominant imagery of the moment and that, furthermore, the reexamination of the past is part of the construction of the present. The question then is whether by reconstructing a strike from the Thatcher era, Jeremy Deller is proposing a break in relation to the dominant imagery of a world where there would otherwise be nothing but high-tech virtuosos or the occasional amused glance at the past, which is complicit with this vision. The retrospective glance at the counterculture of the past in fact covers two problems: first, the relationship to the militant culture of the years of revolt, which is not necessarily nostalgic. It is, rather, acidic in the work of Sam Durant, for example, to say nothing of the work of Josephine Meckseper, who tries to show protest culture as a form of youth fashion. Second, the relationship to popular culture, which seems to me to be the object of a new mutation. In the era of Pop art and the Nouveaux Réalistes, we gladly used popular "bad taste" to destabilize "high culture." Martin Parr's photographs of kitsch follow in this tradition. But there is a more positive attempt today to give form to a continuity between artistic creativity and the forms of creativity manifested in objects and behaviors that testify to everyone's capacities and to our inherent powers of resistance. Works like Jean-Luc Moulène's photographic series *Objets de grève* [Strike Objects, 1999–2000] or the installation *Menschen Dinge* [The Human Aspect of Objects, 2005] created at the Buchenwald Memorial by Esther Shalev-Gerz around objects repurposed and refashioned by detainees of the camp are just two examples—examples that suit my argument perhaps too well. In any case, this way of relating to popular culture or to countercultures from the point of view of the capacities they set in motion and not the images they convey seems to me to be the real political issue of the present.

KELSEY: Or maybe contemporary art *is* the official scene now. We could argue that many artists today promote the belief that certain modes of resistance are now obsolete. But in what ways do you see contemporary artists opening this question of the constitution of our world? Do any examples come to mind?

RANCIÈRE: I would rather talk about dissensus than resistance. Dissensus is a modification of the coordinates of the sensible, a spectacle or a tonality that replaces another. Sophie Ristelhueber photographs



I am neither a historian of art nor a philosopher of politics, but I work on this question: What landscape can one describe as the meeting place between artistic and political practice?



The Mollusk of Reference

JOHN KELSEY ON "ROGER AND OUT"

THAT SCHOOL FOR HER WAS THE LOCAL BOOKSTORE and bartending in a city without an academy, serving people like Martin Kippenberger and Rosemarie Trockel, may be one reason why Cosima von Bonin is so singularly attuned to the dynamics by which artists emerge and become recognized as actors in their field. As the story goes, her own career begins with the moment she suddenly insists that her friends and customers in Cologne thenceforth refer to her as "the artist" Cosima von Bonin. Ever since, her practice has been an elaboration of the notion that the artist is information transmitted and received. All her themes—the self-historicizing of a community that both includes and excludes, indoctrination and discipline, role-playing and rank, the performance of success and failure, etc.—announce artistic production as a tactical, performative engagement with a given set of power relations. Some say that what keeps von Bonin's story interesting is precisely the fact that she is not and never has been a real artist, so every move she makes risks betraying her original (creative) imposture. Others admit that she intimidates them with the Brandoesque power of her act, and that it's too late now to call her out without risking one's own credibility too.

In any case, with her retrospective "Roger and Out" having recently opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles—at this midcareer moment, that is, in von Bonin's mythic trajectory—it seems obvious that we aren't bored yet. If now is the time of survey and summary, of piling up the loot in the museum's main gallery and making it official, there is nevertheless still the feeling of a gamble being made, on the part of both the artist and the institution and dealers who represent her. Will this attempt to make her work legible in America come at the price of neutralizing the dialogical play insiders have always loved in von Bonin's work? Will Cologne open up or clam up in Los Angeles? "Roger and Out" both confirms and ends the conversation, acknowledging a message received and signing off in the same breath. The receiver of this brief transmission, whether a friend or a faceless ticket buyer, picks up the double message of communication and its interruption, and somehow it sounds like competence.

In the catalogue for the show, texts by MOCA curators Ann Goldstein (who organized the exhibition) and Bennett Simpson and by critics Isabelle Graw and Manfred Hermes recount how von Bonin emerged within the postmanly,



postpainterly context of early-1990s Cologne, specifically in relation to the contentious clique of neo-Conceptualists and institutional critics attached to Galerie Christian Nagel. Tales and details of the artist's early collaborations with Kai Althoff, Josef Strau, and many others, of how her projects intersected with the fiercely collective ethic of the artist-run space Friesenwall 120 and with the upstart feminism of the journal *Eau de Cologne*, of her wily navigations of tricky art-couple dynamics (she has been married to Michael Krebber since 1992), and of all the various ways she has shown up as an artist without exactly being one, and risked making art of *that*, both historicize and mythologize the artist in Cologne in Los Angeles. This is because the local history that includes von Bonin is also the story of an art world performing itself with a vengeance, and because of the extent to which her works remain embedded in a collective reappropriation of context via the ruses of fiction. Some art can't simply be shown or described—it must be scripted and followed, especially when the artist's primary material is the social field in which she continually repositions herself. In this case, to curate is to map tactical moves in relation to both materials and people, and to install is to fabulate. To consume von Bonin in a museum is to engage something unavoidably legendary in her practice.

At MOCA, a narrow corridor leads us through scrappy traces of early von Bonin, presenting examples of a practice readable mostly in the gaps. *Untitled (Krebber über Krebber)*, 1990, is a black-and-white photograph of a topless woman with long hair and dark glasses whose bare white skin has been inscribed with an all-male roster of avant-garde brand names (Duchamp, Picabia, Schwitters . . .). It's based on an appropriated *Flash Art* ad from the '70s. Subtly altering this source image by replacing the name *Klapheck* with *Krebber*, and leaving the rest as she found it, von Bonin performs authorship as a nearly imperceptible act of trespassing on the domain of others. And if naming is the job of men, then renaming is the more devious and resistant function by which this nonartist enters occupied territory, freeing up some space for her own movement. While everything about the image is up and down—the bold verticality of the model's stance serving as a support for the list of men that extends down into her unzipped jeans—von Bonin's gesture is cunningly horizontal. And this is how she arrives as an artist:

laterally, by means of a sliding and displacement.

Another instance of appropriation and naming, and another play on verticality and inclusion, *Installation Münzstrasse Hamburg*, 1990/2007, revisits von Bonin's very first "solo" exhibition, a collaboration with Strau. For this work, initially shown at Ausstellungsraum Münzstrasse 10 in Hamburg, Strau and von Bonin took as their primary material a list of the artists included in Harald Szeemann's 1969 exhibition "Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form," but revised it by adding some contemporaries—Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman, Kippenberger, et al. They then printed the name of each artist, along with the years of his or her birth and first solo exhibition, on a helium balloon. The work reconstructs and elevates a community of artists, floating the names of others up to a horizontal wooden grid where the thirty-two multicolored balloons are finally caught and immobilized as a sort of hanging garden.



hand-stitched with figures and texts—have been her signature product. Dominating the MOCA catalogue, where virtually her entire *lappen* output is represented, these works recall both Sigmar Polke's famous use of mass-produced textiles as supports for paintings and Mike Kelley's hand-crafted banners, not to mention Sergej Jensen's recent "paintings" made of found fabrics. In von Bonin's case, the materials she chooses often come precharged with contemporary lifestyle signifiers, either because the prints are identifiable as Laura Ashley or Marks & Spencer, or because here and there she appropriates an Yves Saint Laurent

shopping bag or adds designer Martin Margiela's signature X stitch to a composition. This X even recurs on the back of the exhibition catalogue, putting the book itself and all its contents under the sign of couture. At once folksy and luxurious, DIY and gallery-friendly, von Bonin's expensive rags extend a territory where art and fashion immediately abandon their difference. And this isn't merely a

Von Bonin's post-'90s work anticipates the professional artist's return as full-time manager of her own brand-image.

Von Bonin's first and only appearance at American Fine Arts, New York, in 1993, is represented in the MOCA show by a series of crude drawings of prison windows—another collaboration, this one between artist-dealer Colin de Land and a caged parakeet. These lo-fi works, which consist of chalk and bird droppings on cardboard, did not greet viewers en masse at the AFA opening but were completed one at a time, by dealer and bird, over the course of the show. So we have, on the one hand, the disciplinary functions of lists, grids, and cages, and on the other, the possibility of meandering and sideways movements, and a systematic horizontality that occurs not only formally but in all the ways the artist displaces authorship across a social field that now includes animals.

At the end of the '90s, the performative aspects of von Bonin's work begin to reflect a general expansion and speeding up of the international art market. Like everything else, the artist goes global, and the recurrence of fashion signifiers in her practice mirrors the way artists are circulated as values within the sprawling noncontext of Chelsea and Art Basel. In her catalogue text for "Roger and Out," Graw describes von Bonin's shift from ephemeral and intensely collaborative projects to the kind of object-production befitting an international art star both as a decided "capitulation" to market forces and, paradoxically, as a devious "outperforming" of the market's demands. Since 2000, and right up through her "major" Chelsea shows at Friedrich Petzel Gallery in 2003 and 2006 and at Documenta 12, von Bonin's large-scale "*lappen*" (rags)—paintinglike compositions of readymade textiles

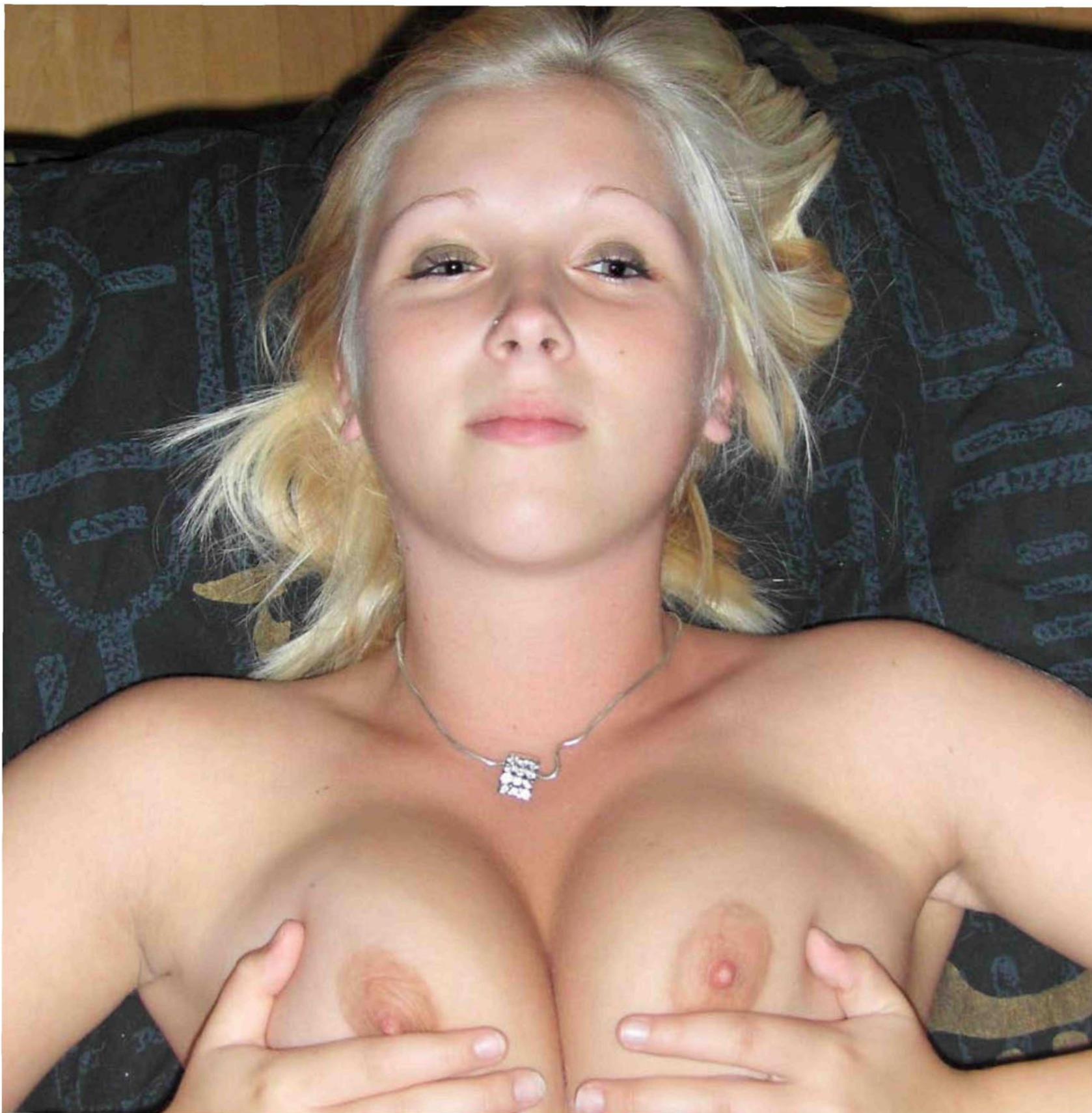
return to a formative '90s moment when the figures of the designer, the DJ, and the artist joined forces in the production of what was once experienced as participatory urban "subculture." Glancing back to a time when von Bonin escaped her own instrumentalization by deferring authorship in incomplete and overpopulated works, or by elaborating a paradoxically (and glamorously) non-productive workaholicism typical of Cologne in the '90s, her post-'90s work also anticipates the professional artist's return as full-time manager of her own brand-image today.* It seems there is more than one way for a contemporary artist to disappear. Sometimes it's by doing nothing, sometimes by doing too much, and von Bonin has a way of keeping this difference problematic and undecidable.

The House of von Bonin is built around contradictory qualities: soft and hard, tame and rabid, personable and inscrutable. Appropriately, then, cartoonish dogs—stitched into compositions like *Ja, ich bin's. Ich bin dein Hund* (Yes, I Am It. I Am Your Dog), 2003, and in the form of oversize soft sculptures—began to proliferate throughout her oeuvre a few years ago; as a sort of logo, the floppy puppy is clearly in attack mode

at MOCA. The fact that these products coincide with what Graw describes as the dissolution of the social context that grounded von Bonin's early work, and that the artist's recent shifts in scale and strategy respond to increasingly opportune market conditions, seems to announce the end of bohemian life-as-art in Cologne and the global spread of the empire of lifestyle (or what Hal Foster has called the "designed subject" and the perverse and cynical return of modernist design

Opposite page: Cosima von Bonin, *Untitled (Krepper über Krepper)*, 1990, black-and-white photograph, 37 1/4 x 13 1/4". This page, from top: Cosima von Bonin and Josef Strau, *Installation Münzstrasse Hamburg*, 1990/2007, balloons and ink. Installation view, Ausstellungsraum Münzstrasse 10, Hamburg, 1990. View of Cosima von Bonin, "Roger and Out," 2007, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Photo: Brian Forrest.





utopias in the form of, for example, the computer-assisted virus of Koolhaas-Mau-Prada). If von Bonin is now “outperforming” the absorption of her world by market forces, it is not only through her many references to lifestyle consumption but in the way her elaboration of a signature style becomes an actual styling and making-over of the museum itself. Standing guard in the galleries, one of many possible stand-ins for the artist is *Untitled (The Grey Bulldog with Box & Aprons)*, 2006, sitting blank and sphinxlike atop a closed wooden box. We’re not sure whether it wants to be hugged or left alone.

An extremely deluxe-looking object that has been making recent appearances (in other versions) at galleries and art fairs is *Decoy (Der Krake #3)*, 2007. She is a large, soft octopus sewn from colorful Japanese sailcloth, with delicate, glinting glass-tipped tentacles. Known for her intelligence and inky escapes and for the fact that she decorates her own home, the octopus suggests a number of things about the conditions under which she now appears: the sticky clutches of capital, the shape-shifting and multitasking of the contemporary artist, the subject’s strangeness to itself as it trades places with the commodity . . . or perhaps she is what the poet Paul Valéry once called the “all-powerful Mollusk of Reference.” Here and elsewhere, the octopus remains camouflaged in her bright colors and seems to recoil from explication. She is a must-have, delicately sprawled on a white plinth amid an installation of very hard, severe new sculptures in white powder-coated steel, including *McD Gate*, 2007, a bright, blank, inverted L, self-illuminated by three fluorescent tubes. As cool as a Cady Noland and taller



Opposite page: Cosima von Bonin, *Kapitulation*, 2004, mixed media, 35' 1 1/2" x 27' 2 1/4" x 14' 1 1/2". Installation view, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2007. Photo: Brian Forrest. This page, from top: View of Cosima von Bonin, “Roger and Out,” 2007, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Foreground: *Decoy (Der Krake #3)*, 2007. Photo: Brian Forrest. View of Cosima von Bonin, “Roger and Out,” 2007, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. From left: Yves Saint Laurent, 1997; Yves Saint Laurent (*Decoy #1*), 2007. Photo: Brian Forrest.

a tweed-covered catamaran and its pilot—a soft Jar Jar Binks figure, also covered in tweed. The video involves von Bonin’s longtime collaborators Dirk von Lowtzow and Thies Mynther (of the electropop group Phantom/Ghost), Yvonne Quirnbach (who also designed the catalogue for “Roger and Out”), the artist’s dogs Lord Jim and Boy George, and many others on camera and off. Ritualistically collaborative, the video choreographs fashion-styled bodies to music performed by von Lowtzow and Mynther, both wearing plastic dog masks. Actors enter and exit, work and pose, write on the walls, and finally destroy the sailboat’s pontoons. Like the twin hull of the catamaran and the set’s divided rooms, the “two positions” in the work’s title might signal von Bonin’s

communication in order to say something about official culture as entertainment as control. Greeting viewers at one end of the gallery is a soft Mighty Mouse skewered on a powder-coated steel pole (*Reference Hell #2 [Mighty Mouse]*, 2007). Above the mouse, a gigantic “bikini” cut from flag fabric festoons the show’s entryway. Hung up as if to dry, *Untitled (Bikini Loop #2)*, 2007, dresses and sexes up the institution as a very big, absent girl.

Also on view is *Kapitulation*, 2004, an installation that functioned as a set for von Bonin’s video *2 Positionen auf einmal (2 Positions at Once)*, playing in a nearby black box. Comprising two cell-like rooms paneled with inscribed chalkboardlike surfaces, the installation’s walled-off, impenetrable decor is only visible from above, a vantage attained by climbing a set of aluminum steps, or from below, by manipulating a rope-operated, cantilevered mirror. The structure houses

Even though the collective and critical ethic of '90s Cologne is now performed as an ironically romanticized ritual—part fashion show, part music video, and part training camp—it persists, acting out the hope of surviving its own perversion.

than the average gallerygoer, this sculpture shares qualities with the bland efficiency of drive-through architecture, high-security prisons, and Minimalist design, and is joined by others in a similar vein, including *Off Minor (Balcony & Tires)*, 2007, a wall-mounted condo-style balcony that holds two readymade race car tires behind its white, jail-like rails, and *Reference Hell #1 (YSL Fauteuil)*, 2007, a chair, also wall-mounted (but too high for sitting), fitted with two stacked cowhide cushions. Sculptures based on fences, classroom furniture, “traps,” and other disciplinary devices fold von Bonin’s ongoing practice of quoting high-end lifestyle culture back into Kafkaesque images of enclosure and biopolitical control. Fashion, at the end of the day, is not just about looking good. Contemporary design unleashes a fear-inflected monoculture that extends from cashmere sweaters to the structural invisibility of government interrogation rooms, each somehow implying the other. Von Bonin’s new work not only suggests the artist’s complicity in design’s job of dressing up violence, it hijacks the museum as site of pedagogical

strategically ambivalent relationship to the programmed trajectory of an artist’s career. She is still part nonartist. And even though the collective and critical ethic of '90s Cologne is now performed as an ironically romanticized and melancholic ritual—part fashion show, part music video, and part training camp—it persists nonetheless, acting out the hope of surviving its own perversion in the present. Is this another way of saying “relational aesthetics”? In any case, von Bonin’s use of style as a means of elaborating games between subjects and objects, between the artist and her works, is as controlling as it is evasive. It is where the contemporary subject loses its distance from the commodity, but it is also the place where distances can be reappropriated and made strange again. It is how the octopus moves through museums. □

JOHN KELSEY IS AN ARTIST AND CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM.

*In “The Non-productive Attitude,” a text written on the occasion of the group exhibition “Make Your Own Life: Artists In and Out of Cologne” (which was organized by Bennett Simpson at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, in 2006 and included von Bonin), Josef Strau writes of the uneasy “fusion of glam and politics” in a context where critical strategies were often inflected by envy and fear.





John Kelsey

JOHN KELSEY IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM. HE IS ALSO A MEMBER OF THE COLLECTIVE BERNADETTE CORPORATION AND COFOUNDER OF REENA SPAULINGS FINE ART IN NEW YORK. HIS TEXT "SCULPTURE IN AN ABANDONED FIELD" WAS INCLUDED IN THE CATALOGUE FOR RACHEL HARRISON'S EXHIBITION "IF I DID IT" AT GREENE NAFTALI IN NEW YORK IN 2007. *EINE PINOT GRIGIO, BITTE*, A SCREENPLAY BY BERNADETTE CORPORATION, WAS PUBLISHED THIS YEAR BY STERNBERG PRESS.

1 *Décor: A Conquest by Marcel Broodthaers, 1975/2007* Seminal, groundbreaking, and important are words typically used to describe this two-room artwork by Belgian ex-poet Broodthaers, which was presented for the first time in New York this past summer at Michael Werner Gallery. Dust off the nineteenth-century canons and stuffed python, unpack the twentieth-century pistols and patio furniture, and see what Mike Kelley was talking about in 1995, when he called Broodthaers's approach "hokey and obvious," yet admirable in its way of being so "sincere and insincere at the same time." The work is like a movie set propped with ready-made stand-ins for Europe's modern colonial history. Decades before "installation art" became a household term, *Décor*—an early, more playful instance of institutional critique—went quaintly and deviously to war. The uptown display coincided with a downtown screening, organized by White Columns, of the artist's strange short films at Anthology Film Archives.

2 *Grindhouse* Written, produced, and directed by Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino, this B-movie double feature is interrupted by trailers for other fictional productions, gaps representing missing reels, and fake print damage. The first part, Rodriguez's *Planet Terror*, is a schlock zombie apocalypse. The second is Tarantino's excellent hot-rod picture, *Death Proof*, a narrative that is also split in two—like a highway, the A and B sides of a record, or a brain. Two ensembles of actresses (including Rosario Dawson, Vanessa Ferlito, and the stuntwoman Zoë Bell, playing herself) eat up the screen as the film veers between Rohmer-esque conversation and bursts of bodily violence,

cut to upbeat songs like "Hold Tight" by Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick & Tich.

3 *Relax It's Only a Bad Cosima von Bonin Show* The catalogue accompanying Merlin Carpenter's exhibition at Galerie Bleich-Rossi in Vienna is one of the most anarchically devised artist's books in print. Portraits of the artist posing with blank canvases in a hellish art-supply store, slick ads for Mercedes-Benz bicycles (which have appeared as readymades in other Carpenter shows), painters' easels and paintings of easels, and texts by Carpenter and his sister appear in separate, brochurelike sections with brutally mismatched formats, barely bound by a flimsy white thread. Designed by Non-Format, the book prefers not to come together around its subject.

4 *I.U.D.* Minimal, pounding, contagious noise-music made by two women—Lizzi Bougatsos (of Gang Gang Dance) and Sadie Laska—on two drum kits and two microphones. *Dead Womb*, seven inches of vinyl, was released in September on the Social Registry label and was celebrated with shows at Brooklyn venues Studio B and Glasslands.

5 *Ode to the Man Who Kneels* Following his *End of Reality*, 2006, a play constructed around a series of monologues and brawls, Richard Maxwell's new musical is a western set in a town called Grid that deals out strange, stripped-down violence and "basic," even stranger language and songs. Characters are killed, but they don't stop singing. *Ode* was presented at the Performing Garage in New York in early November with a cast of Jim Fletcher, Anna Kohler, Emily Cass McDonnell, Greg Mehrten, and Brian Mendes, and with Mike Iveson on piano and Maxwell on guitar.

6 *Freelance Stenographer* A sort of antihappening by Seth Price and Kelley Walker was produced on-site at The Kitchen on April 2. It began with a projected video comprising footage of a semfictional New York dance-pop group named the Economist (Cory Arcangel, Emily Sundblad, and Stefan Tcherepnin) at work in the studio, video material from The Kitchen's own archive (a restaged Oskar Schlemmer performance), an appropriated documentary in progress about the interactive cyber-community Second Life, shots of New York skylines, and rudimentary digital effects—and was followed by a Q&A with the artists. Everything was recorded in real time by a professional stenographer whose transcription was photocopied and distributed as an instant document of its own making. The "event" was a self-recording machine instantly filed away in the no time it took to translate live into archive.

7 *Dot Dot Dot, Issue 14 ("S as in SStenographer"), Summer 2007* This issue of *Dot Dot Dot*, a journal published by Dexter Sinister, appropriates a rejected cover design for *Cabinet* magazine. Inside is an interview with former Revolver publisher Christoph Keller, who discusses dilettantism, distillation, and his current farm life while serving homemade schnapps to the editors from bottles of his own design. Other highlights deal with modern histories of book design, Richard Hamilton's *Collected Words*, and the "aesthetics of distribution."

8 *Evas Arche und der Feminist* During their Sunday-night gatherings at Passerby in New York, hosts Pati Hertling, an art-restitution lawyer, and her collaborator, artist Marlous Borm, serve homemade soup and bottled beer

while their friends eat, exhibit, drink, and perform. For Sunday #8, which was given over to artist Kerstin Brätsch, they covered the exhibition "New York Is Dead" with sheets of black protective plastic before opening Eva's doors to a musical act by Ronnie Bass, Jeremy Eilers, and Nic Xedro; Allison Katz and Georgia Sagri (accompanied by Brätsch); and DJ Antek Walczak.

9 *"77 Testicular Imprints"* To make the works in his exhibition at Roth Gallery in New York, Nicolás Guagnini used oil paint and his own balls for a brush, marking and citing a series of archival documents (including an early, typewritten Dan Graham poem and personal stationery recovered from Hitler's bunker). A brute, faux-macho gesture of signing and appropriation, but also a critical operation undermining the notions of property, inclusion, and value. The "imprints" are smart and stupid like Broodthaers's recurring, museological eagles, and as elegant in their conception—until you start noticing the pubic hairs stuck in the paint.

10 *The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris* George Baker's book, published by MIT Press, is the first in English dealing specifically with Picabia's Dada work in Paris and is a serious rethinking of the readymade (the other, *Picabian* one) based on a study of the artist's singularly multifarious practice. Once, before an audience of friends, Picabia broke open an alarm clock and used its parts as paintbrushes. He also cut a hole in a sheet of paper and called it *Jeune Fille*. Baker's book has a shiny golden cover with a reproduction of Picabia's *Natures Mortes, 1920*—a "portrait" consisting of a crucified stuffed monkey surrounded by the names of famous Impressionists. □

1. Marcel Broodthaers, *Décor: A Conquest by Marcel Broodthaers, 1975/2007*, mixed media. Installation view, Galerie de France, Paris, 2007. Photo: Patrick Müller. © 2007 Estate of Marcel Broodthaers/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SABAM, Brussels. 2. Poster for fictitious movie *Death Proof* from Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino's *Grindhouse* (2007). 3. Merlin Carpenter's artist's book/catalogue for his exhibition "Relax It's Only a Bad Cosima von Bonin Show," 2007. Galerie Bleich-Rossi, Vienna. 4. Photocollage of members of I.U.D., 2007. 5. Richard Maxwell, *Ode to the Man Who Kneels*, 2007. Performance view, Bollwerk International Festival, Fribourg, Switzerland, 2007. 6. Seth Price and Kelley Walker, *Freelance Stenographer*, 2007, still from a color video, 33 minutes 6 seconds. 7. Cover of *Dot Dot Dot*, no. 14 (Summer 2007). 8. Documentary photograph of Evas Arche und der Feminist #8 at Gavin Brown's Enterprise at Passerby, New York, 2007. 9. Nicolás Guagnini, *77 Testicular Imprints* (detail), 2007, one of seventy-seven oil paintings on paper, dimensions variable. 10. Cover of George Baker's *Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris* (MIT Press, 2007).



LIKE HER PRACTICE, Charline von Heyl's studio is split in two: One room is for painting and the other for works on paper. In this second room, by the door that leads to the other side, is a large-format Epson ink-jet printer, one of the many machines the artist has enlisted in her recent experiments with printmaking and collage. Although she is known primarily as a painter, von Heyl has been spending more and more time devising unexpected encounters between digital reproduction and archaic precursors such as hand-carved woodcuts, stencils, lithographs, and screenprints. Paper functions as a carrier for many techniques, each layered on top of the other in unorthodox sequences and mixtures. As relentlessly abstract as her canvases, von Heyl's works on paper are like travel posters for unpicturable, exploded destinations; they are pages of chaos. *Sabotage*, a book to be published next month by Xn Éditions and Christophe Daviet-Thery, in a limited edition of three hundred, is the latest project to emerge from the nonpainting side of von Heyl's studio.

Rejecting both written language and illustration, *Sabotage* is a sort of image-text that gets straight to one of the book format's most abstract possibilities: the material production of a sort of counterspace that exists beyond meaning. Interspersing transparent (Mylar) and opaque (paper) pages—a selection of the latter have been reconceived for publication here—*Sabotage* exploits the optical effects of superimposition while riveting the attention of its reader to the basic activity of turning pages. Isn't this every book's most

intimate desire—to be ransacked and explored by fingers and eyes? Each turned page makes and unmakes the next, and the book remains in a state of constant optical transformation.

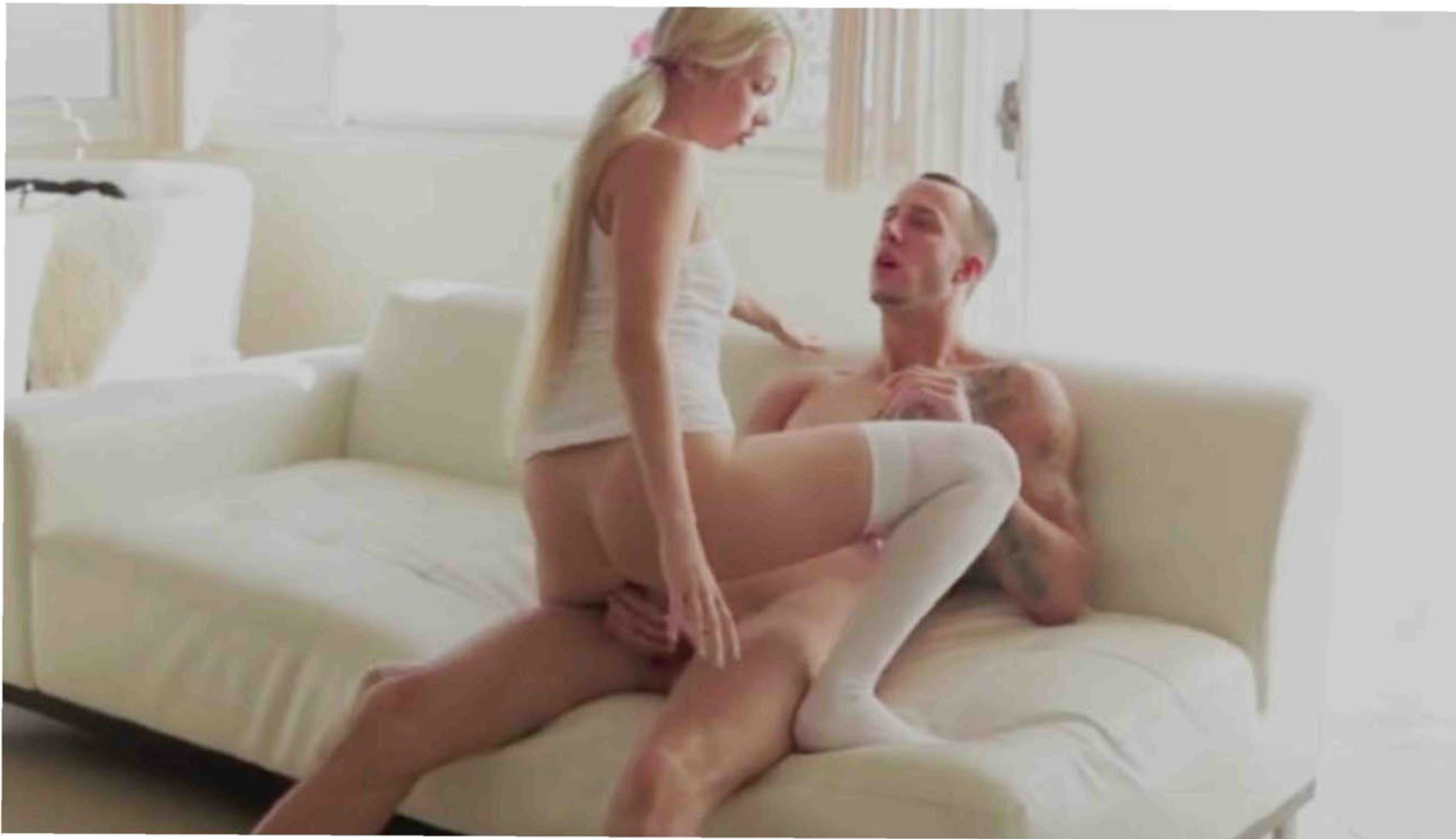
Stéphane Mallarmé, too, was fascinated by the fact that a book is above all an optical device—he even addressed the way a volume poses in the glamorous space of a shopwindow. With *Sabotage*, von Heyl invents something strange and ultimately unknowable with the purely material and energetic qualities of the book: surface and movement, ink and action. She lures the viewer into a readerly relation with her two-sided images. Frequently appropriating fragments of vintage comic books, found photographs, and other ready-made visuals, von Heyl layers and attacks these in such a way that they lose any illustrative function. *Sabotage* thus pursues a notion of abstraction as a process that resists representation, but that is also cunning and ironic enough to be able to picture itself—rampantly quoting aesthetic histories and styles, striking poses on the page. It is formalism exploiting its own power to leap from one content to another, reprogramming the book as a machine for producing surfaces.

Sabotage is a book that amplifies and activates everything in itself that would normally be suppressed by the dominance of text. Happily illiterate, it provokes backward and forward movement while engaging the physical presence of the reader, who is immediately implicated in von Heyl's creative, rhythmic notion of sabotage.

—JOHN KELSEY



Interior of Charline von Heyl's studio, New York, 2008. Photo: Charline von Heyl.



BEST OF 2008

Daniel McDonald

Broadway 1602, New York

JOHN KELSEY

PLAYING WITH DOLLS is a pastime for sissies and shut-ins, and, as artists from Hans Bellmer to Todd Haynes have shown, it is also a hands-on means of objectifying the terrors and traumas of one's time, whether in psychotherapy or in the gallery. Indeed, as the credit crunch hits the headlines and now the city, the moment seems right for this series of hilariously downsized allegories of subjective and economic crisis, and what genre more fitting than schlock horror? In his first solo exhibition in Gotham, "Bohemian Monsters," at Broadway 1602, Daniel McDonald peopled miniature yet epic tableaux with mummies, zombies, and other mass-produced "action figures" bought on eBay and surgically restyled by the artist, in order to depict the lower depths of the art-world food chain—a downtown pressure-cooked by gentrification and the crackdown on

"quality of life" crimes and terror, first under Giuliani and then Bloomberg.

McDonald, who also makes jewelry under the name Mended Veil, is brilliant in small scale. Obsessive, DIY craftsmanship and an arch, conceptual approach to found objects inform the artist's move from gothic costume jewelry to these new, intricate sculptures, which condense two decades of Lower Manhattan's mutant history into tightly arranged scenes that play out at comic book speed. *Goodbye (The Wolfman and Frankenstein)*, 2008, presents a hipster werewolf clutching a bouquet of roses, in the act of kicking down the door of a cramped apartment where a little Jack Pierson-style text work spells out *GOODBY* . . . on the wall, and a mini Y props open the window. A second figure, holding an *E*, is already up on the roof, about to jump. In *An Experiment in Self-Medication (Doctor Jekyll as Mr. Hyde)*, 2008, a solitary figure wearing a paint-smeared lab coat guzzles alcohol in a studio strewn with bottles. The scene is itself bottled—an allegory of addiction trapped under a bell jar. There is a perversity in McDonald's reduced scales and self-enclosed forms that calls to mind certain works by Duchamp, such as *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette*, 1921, a small sculpture based on a readymade perfume bottle, and *Boite-en-valise*, 1935–41, whereby the artist carefully reproduced his own works as a miniature, foldout career retrospective inside a small suitcase. Playing on a confusion between artistic subjectivity and the ready-made commodity, McDonald's project underlines the living-dead status of products and selves that outlast their expiration dates, while foregrounding a hobbyist's approach to making objects—self-sufficient, self-sustaining, never in a hurry. You can imagine

McDonald producing this show at home, in front of the TV, in an apartment not unlike the ones he fabricates in miniature. In his case, the joke is in how the hobbyist's detached and retiring attitude collides with the end-of-the-rope urgencies that dramatize his sculptures.

McDonald experienced the previous economic recession as codirector of American Fine Arts gallery in New York, where he and other Cooper Union grads joined forces with dealer Colin de Land to form Art Club 2000, a collective whose mid-1990s work portrayed an urban youth scene striking ironic and critical poses against the backdrop of SoHo's collapse and the rise of the megastore. Soon all the good nightclubs would be closed down. In that context, DIY was both a mode of humble resistance and a real necessity for those interested in keeping some version of bohemian self-invention alive in the city. It was the era of club kids, Wu-Tang Clan, Tommy Hilfiger, Alleged Gallery, Narcotics Anonymous, and other mutant formations. This time around, however, McDonald shows us the impotence and absurdity of stereotypically underground lifestyles in the face of unstoppable urban development. In *Demolition of Affordable Housing (The Phantom of the Opera)*, 2007, a dandyish ghoul stands paralyzed next to a tiny typewriter and a bin full of even tinier crumpled pages, while a toy crane stands ready to raze his crumbling, claustrophobic world. These are not only images of the artist destroyed by madness, starving, hysterical, etc. These are metaphors for bohemia in the process of being disappeared by the far darker forces of global finance. In *Forced to Sell Artwork from Personal Collection in Order to Offset Living Expenses (The Wicked Witch of the West)*, 2008, a green-faced collector-hag creeps into a gallery with the obvious intention of selling back an artwork that also happens to

Playing on a confusion between artistic subjectivity and the ready-made commodity, McDonald's project underlines the living-dead status of products and selves that outlast their expiration dates.

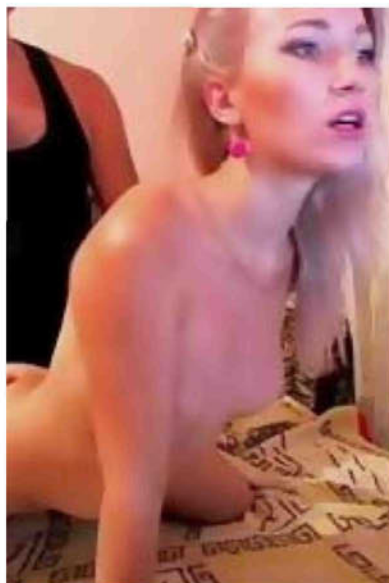
be her own Warhol celebrity portrait. "Bohemian Monsters" presents the new downtown: a creaking ruin, now fractured into a series of isolated freak-outs and cooped-up crisis couples, trapped in airless art studios and overpriced apartments that resemble B-horror sets.

During the Great Depression, films such as *Frankenstein* and *Freaks* resonated with common fears of disaster and misfortune, and for Western consumers living through the cold war period, Hollywood B movies in the sci-fi and horror genres tapped popular anxieties about the bomb and Soviet invasion. Referencing these histories in "Bohemian Monsters," McDonald reflects a contemporary dread particular to New York: a feeling that what we once imagined as the "artist's life" is no longer possible here, or only possible as a sort of "bad," no-budget movie. He also orchestrates a couple of crowd scenes: *Available Space (Various Figures)*, 2008, depicts a horde of mutant/monster creative types lined up in the street outside a padlocked door bearing the words ALTERNATIVE SPACE; *Artists Under Consideration*, 2008, appropriately installed in the gallery's office, is a gruesome filing cabinet overflowing with corpses and CVs—a bohemian graveyard. Strung like rotten pearls on a very thin thread, the figures in these scenes populate the dark side of what we call the creative network, spooked by the possibility that they could soon find themselves as uselessly adrift in this world as yesterday's hedge-fund managers and other, less privileged sectors of the global multitude.

We've carried the notion of the freedom-seeking outsider into these times, but find no proper space in which to live it. Given the spiraling of the global financial crisis, artists may find it necessary to elaborate other, more cunning (and therapeutic) relations to their own crisis, and to the real estate they haunt. If the credit-driven economy is a fiction that no longer functions, art, too, will have to put dysfunction back into play. It will get smaller, weirder, and more monstrous. □

JOHN KELSEY IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM.

Opposite page: View of Daniel McDonald, "Bohemian Monsters," 2008, Broadway 1602, New York. From left: *Goodbye (The Wolfman and Frankenstein)*, 2008; *Demolition of Affordable Housing (The Phantom of the Opera)*, 2007. This page, from left: Daniel McDonald, *Forced to Sell Artworks from Personal Collection in Order to Offset Living Expenses (The Wicked Witch of the West)*, 2008, mixed media, 10½ x 8 x 2½". Daniel McDonald, *Available Space (Various Figures)*, 2008, mixed media, 12 x 16 x 6¾". Daniel McDonald, *Demolition of Affordable Housing (The Phantom of the Opera) (detail)*, 2007, mixed media, 7 x 4½ x 4¼". Daniel McDonald, *Artists Under Consideration*, 2008, mixed media, 18½ x 12½ x 10¾".



“theanyspacewhatever”

SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM,
NEW YORK

John Kelsey

MAYBE WE'VE FINALLY GIVEN UP on the “old realism of places,” as Gilles Deleuze put it. In his book *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983), he used the term *espace quelconque*—“whatever-space” or “any-space-whatever”—to describe the cinematic image of undone space that, however shattered or blurred it may be, is also a space of pure potential. It could be a wasted urban void or a shaky zoom into the luminous screen of a Macintosh. It is a postwar feeling of lost coordinates, a certain anonymous emptiness. It is a space that could be “extracted” from the familiar state of things embodied in a place like the Guggenheim Museum in New York, leaving us even more floating and detached than before in the great rotunda. It is both ruined and fresh.

The discourse that supports the work of the ten artists included in “theanyspacewhatever”—Angela Bulloch, Maurizio Cattelan, Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Douglas Gordon, Carsten Höller, Pierre Huyghe, Jorge Pardo, Philippe Parreno, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, artists who were routinely grouped together in exhibitions in Europe throughout the 1990s but had never before been collectively presented in an American museum—links their practices to notions of promiscuous collaboration, conviviality, “relational aesthetics,” open-endedness, and the exhibition as medium. While such claims are typically inflected with a radical if not utopian promise that sounds even less credible today than it did

ten years ago, it should be said that, in their own statements, the artists themselves have been more ambivalent about the emancipatory possibilities of contemporary creative networks and exhibitions that emulate pubs, kitchens, laboratories, island holidays, or open-plan offices rather than product showrooms. Still, a long decade of effort by the artists and curators who populate this exhibition and its catalogue went into producing the feeling of a legitimate, international, hyperactive, jet-set avant-garde for these times—one that put the dream of the self-organized community back at the center of its project. It spread everywhere, seeped into institutions (from which it sometimes seemed to lose any distinction), and spiraled calmly down the drain of the Guggenheim. At the bottom, Cattelan’s Pinocchio floated facedown in a pool of water (*Daddy Daddy*, 2008), a Disneyfied version of a hard-core neorealist ending to this collective story—a false ending that greets you upon entering the show.

It’s usually at the very moment when an idea like “community” is on the verge of extinction that it becomes so obsessively evoked, even fetishized, in the art world. Echoing historical models such as Fluxus, but more sedately, and responding to contemporary influences such as institutional critique, but with a softer and more with-it attitude, the artistic strategies championed by curators such as Nicolas Bourriaud, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Maria Lind de-emphasize the finished product in favor of discursive situations, whether these be Plexiglas “discussion platforms,” shared meals, semi-fictional texts, participatory “scenarios,” or films based on conversations. Such scenarization and programming of social intercourse within art projects and institutions has brought frequent accusations of formalism, if not cynicism, against certain of these artists (see *October* 110 [2004]). And it’s true that in the whateverworld, discourse goes hand in hand with design and decor. In the Guggenheim, for example, one encountered Gillick’s floating powder-coated steel texts (INFORMATION HERE, A CONTINUATION, etc.), which attempted to have some Broodthaersian fun with the fact that the museum is also

a system of signs and commands (*theanyspacewhatever signage system*, 2008). Gordon contributed stick-on fragments of banal verbiage (NOTHING WILL EVER BE THE SAME) around the rotunda, viral advertising style (*pretty much every word written, spoken, heard, overheard from 1989 . . . , 2006/2008*). Both of these preserved a distinctly ’90s look, with all-lowercase lettering drifted in a lot of empty white. Parreno’s cartoonish, white-on-white illuminated marquee over the museum’s entrance, although blank, posited spectacle—paradoxically, and in a typically “relational” move—as a site of potential communication (*Marquee, Guggenheim, NY, 2008*). Blanking out some free space in the heart of the entertainment complex can be a disruptive gesture, or it can be another way of saying that whatever space is no longer a place to announce anything.

The show achieved a certain “badness,” and a certain self-consciousness around the possibility of a flop (especially following the opening salvo of Parreno’s marquee), which defused the old question of whether the work was utopian or complicit, of whether open works and promiscuous collaboration are part of the solution or part of the problem today. At the Guggenheim, the liberal-democratic call for free speech, or the relational proposal of open conversation *as art*, was answered by the glaring silence of not-great design or replaced by free-floating words that articulated no other possibility beyond the neutrality of metropolitan spectatorship—passively distracted, anonymously addressed, mildly amused, often bored. Free because unassigned to any particular subject, these whateverwords were also devoid of any recipe for action, collective or otherwise. On the ground floor were racks dispensing free copies of the *Wrong Times*, a happily low-budget newspaper documenting the history of the Wrong Gallery (founded in 2002 by Cattelan, Massimiliano Gioni, and Ali Subotnik) and the many collaborations and conversations that took place under its semifictional auspices. After the Wrong Gallery agreed to curate the Berlin Biennial in 2006, decisively dropping any pretense of autonomy from institutional power, *wrong* seemed to take on another meaning. But



This page, from left: View of “theanyspacewhatever,” 2008, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. From top: Liam Gillick, *theanyspacewhatever signage system*, 2008; Liam Gillick, *Audioguide Bench*, Guggenheim, NY, 2008. Photo: David Heald. Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Chew the Fat*, 2008, mixed media. Installation view, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photo: Kristopher McKay. Opposite page, from left: Angela Bulloch, *Firmamental Night Sky: Oculus. 12.*, 2008, LEDs, neoprene, animated program, hardware. Installation view, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photo: Kristopher McKay. Pierre Huyghe, *Opening*, 2008. Performance view. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, October 24, 2008. Photo: Kristopher McKay.



bad, wrong, and empty may also hide strategies for evading critical death traps and professional sclerosis. They became ways of undoing the Guggenheim moment and the pressures of containment here, of sidestepping achievement. Anyway, being right is a terrible way to end up, in a museum.

Besides discourse, functional seating is another trope common to many of these artists' projects, and in "theanyspacewhatever" bodies could park themselves on Gillick's handsome S-shaped benches (*Audioguide Bench, Guggenheim, NY, 2008*), on a beanbag chair in Gordon and Tiravanija's graffiti-decorated video lounge (*Cinéma Liberté/Bar Lounge, 1996/2008*), or on pillows in the carpeted area where Tiravanija's two-hour-long 2008 documentary *Chew the Fat* was playing. (Höller's bed, fitted with black silk sheets and presented within a hotel-room-like installation, presented another place to kick

Bad, wrong, and empty may hide strategies for evading critical death traps and professional sclerosis. Anyway, being right is a terrible way to end up, in a museum.

back, but this was available by reservation only, for paying overnight guests [*Revolving Hotel Room, 2008*].) If seating is how a socially minded artwork installs the humans who are meant to complete it—as in Tiravanija's reconstitution of his East Village apartment as a public hangout inside the Kölnischer Kunstverein in 1996—extra chairs here were stand-ins for a micro-utopian possibility that was largely banished from "theanyspacewhatever." Sitting on a beanbag in an installation in a biennial may have been a novel experience for art viewers in the '90s, but in New York in 2009, after paying fifteen dollars at the door, one couldn't help but count the whateverminutes ticking by, wondering what had become of sociability in the city. An open seat, like a blank marquee, is a vacancy as much as an invitation, and anyway the downward pull of the ramp

was stronger. An event programmer and an urban planner lurk behind every relational artist, and these practitioners' proposals to reappropriate common space were always elaborated in a strict and conscious relation to the fact of functionalized, policed space. It was never either/or. It was always brief glimpses of the one within the other.

At times, one had the feeling that this show had been copied and pasted, dragged and dropped, into the museum. There was a disconcerting ease, an almost dialed-in feeling, and the impression that a laptop screen was always hovering between artist and viewer. A lot of the art was screenlike, too—for example, Bulloch's illuminated starscape installed on the ceiling high above, which was less a trompe l'oeil sky than a cathedral-scale screen saver (*Firmamental Night Sky: Oculus.12, 2008*). Pardo contributed an installation of intricately laser-cut partitions along one length of the ramp, a topology of veneers that viewers had to navigate on their way down (*Sculpture Ink, 2008*). Gonzalez-Foerster used a blank white scrim to screen off a section of the rotunda, with nothing behind it except the piped-in sound of trickling water, affording the viewer a brief walk through the ambience of a New Age relaxation tape (*Promenade, 2007*). Some areas of the exhibition were left yawningly empty of art or of anything save a snippet of Gordon's vinyl dialogue. The holes that were designed into the show, giving it a loose, work-in-progress feel, were either spaces of Deleuzian pure potential or far-off echoes of Michael Asher's empty galleries, or maybe just moments of empty-handedness, and as retinal as anything that might show up on a screen.

Chew the Fat, which appeared on multiple screens, presented an extended, serial group portrait of the participating artists (joined by nonparticipants such as Elizabeth Peyton and Andrea Zittel). The video dares to expose certain behind-the-scenes truths about this creative milieu: the physical bodies, the way they talk, where they reside, how they treat their employees, what they eat—the lives of the artists. It is a highly demystifying maneuver, and a generous one. Some sequences are edited to reveal what is common to everyone here—for instance, a certain hunched-over attachment to titanium PowerBooks (the

video could work as an ad for Apple). The artists also share the general condition of no-longer-emerging, and we see how it looks to inhabit a forty-something body in a polo shirt, in the comfortable environs of one's business-hippie lifestyle, with so many projects in progress on the screen. They talk of buying real estate, sometimes even calling their homes artworks. There are brief road-movie-like moments as artists shuttle from home to studio. Pardo appears with a big glass of red wine and even cooks a whole pig on camera. Gillick whistles along to the Clash in his sleek home office while working on the cover of an upcoming book. Gonzalez-Foerster strolls alongside a Parisian canal, commenting that these days she prefers to be alone. What *Chew the Fat* reveals is the fact of individuals: how they happen and how they, too, are the product of today's vanguard practices (and discourses). Here Tiravanija risks exposing the not always joyful anonymity that surrounds each artist, their common separation. Noticeably absent from *Chew the Fat* is Cattelan: Never appearing on camera, he is evoked by the other artists via anecdotes. He manages to exist almost purely as discourse and, so, was the exhibition's only escape artist.

"Theanyspacewhatever" also included programmed performances and film screenings in the Guggenheim's theater, as well as some off-site works and discussions. In the rotunda, Huyghe staged a work called *Opening, 2008*, in which viewers wandered the darkened museum with strap-on headlamps, an event that took place three times over the course of the show. Huyghe is the artist who in 1995 founded the Association of Freed Times, conjuring up Situationist calls to "never work." This gesture of appropriating free time for collective use was ambiguous insofar as it was wedded to a contradictory decision to legally register AFT with the local police. "Theanyspacewhatever" started there, on the clock and on the record, and then tried to unwork its way out again. □

"Theanyspacewhatever," organized by Nancy Spector, was on view at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, from Oct. 24, 2008, through Jan. 7, 2009.

JOHN KELSEY IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM.



Idols of the Twilight

JOHN KELSEY ON *THE RUNAWAYS*

RED IS THE COLOR of teen menstrual blood splashing the pavement outside a Hollywood “Pup ‘n’ Fries” drive-thru: ch-ch-ch-cherry bomb! The screen goes red again when Joan Jett (played by teen idol Kristen Stewart) locks lips with a very stoned Cherie Currie (Dakota Fanning) after a concert in a roller rink. We know by the vintage styling of the two lead actresses that this is 1975, the year the all-girl punk band the Runaways was formed. Stewart and Fanning weren’t even born yet, but studious imitation of Runaways concert footage—and training with microphones, guitars, and platform shoes—has prepared them for this flashback. They are professionals, good students of badness. And viewers have been consuming mainstream representations of punk for decades already, so we’re familiar with not only the scenery but the experience of its replay: We’ve already seen *The Runaways*. What we may not have seen is fifteen-year-old Fanning in her underwear, and this is one of the promises selling the film in advance of its release.

The Runaways is based on the book *Neon Angel: The Cherie Currie Story* (1989), the movie star manqué’s written account of her experience as lead singer of the short-lived band. The rise-and-fall narrative the film extracts from her memoir doubles as an antidrug message for contemporary teens. Currie, who now runs a gallery for chainsaw art (www.chainsawchick.com) in Chatsworth, California, was lured into the band at Fanning’s age by the megalomaniac producer Kim

Stewart is the boyish vampire in black, Fanning a pure, blonde soul trapped inside the rock commodity.

Fowley (Michael Shannon), who would later describe the Runaways as “a conceptual rock project that failed.” The film has him reading Sun Tzu’s *Art of War* and hurling dog shit at the band during practice in a trailer park. “Forget about women’s lib—this is about women’s libido!” he screams at the squeamish virgins. Soon his protégée Currie is dressed like a prostitute and gobbling pills by the handful. Later she collapses in a hotel lobby while touring Japan, is hospitalized, and finally walks out on a recording session and out of Fowley’s clutches. Watching the angelic Fanning go through these motions, we understand that her casting

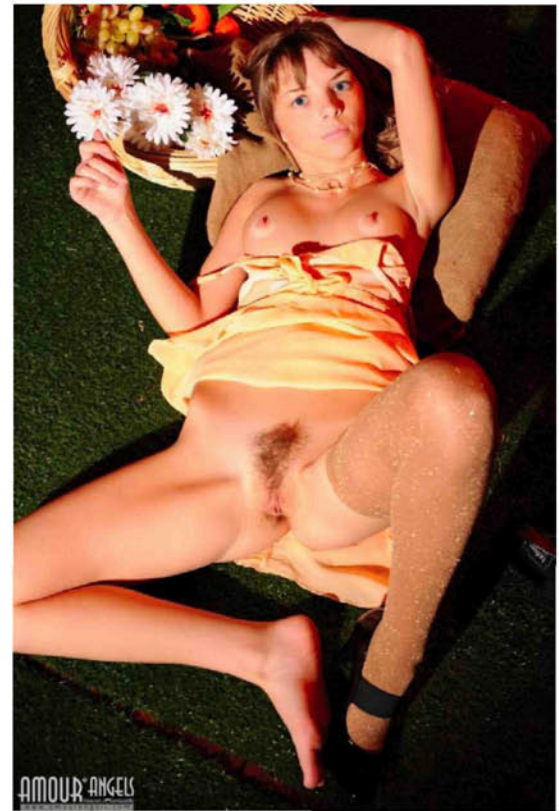
is a crucial aspect of the film’s *dispositif*: The virgin must be debased to be saved, badness must return as goodness, and in this way punk can be redeemed as a positive image of today.

Stewart, for her part, performs the Runaway as a true believer in the journey and the job. Liberated in leather, her Jett flies into the spotlight, saved by rock ‘n’ roll. As Currie goes into her downward spiral, Jett remains stable and cool, a rock professional who keeps the band together against all odds. (The actual Jett is an executive producer of this film.)

It can’t be an accident that the two leading Runaways are also stars of the popular *Twilight* series. (Stewart is, of course, Bella Swan; Fanning plays Jane in the *New Moon* sequel.) Goth’s fantasy is to freeze youth forever in a virginal-corpse pose. Stewart and Fanning’s kiss, which lasts only a few PG seconds on-screen, proves that even in the depths of manipulation and destruction, innocence can be preserved. Stewart is the boyish vampire in black, Fanning a pure, blonde soul trapped inside the rock commodity. Together they produce the *emo jeune fille*, the eternally adolescent self expressing the existential pathos of its own packaging. The product really does have a soul: It is sensitive and androgynous and mourns itself as we consume it.

The brainchild of its male producer, the Runaways was an aggressively ambiguous concept: girls going “where the boys are,” converting femininity into a commercially viable rock product. Were they empowering or enslaving themselves? Punk kept this question open, briefly. “We’re not *your* product!” Jett corrects Fowley. And in the recording booth, Currie finally pulls her own plug. But now the failed project returns as a movie starring Fanning and Stewart, the question loses tension, and punk is reanimated as a dream of good girls. Tapping into goth culture, *The Runaways* deploys the signifiers most appropriate to its task: Because this is a postfeminist exercise in cultural vampirism, a sentimental sing-along featuring the leads’ real voices.

No contemporary rock film can escape the law of the music video and must happen as a sort of rephotography of the ready-made band-image. The director of *The Runaways*, Floria Sigismondi, crossing over from MTV to features, precisely models all her concert scenes on vintage clips that can now be accessed



Floria Sigismondi, *The Runaways*, 2010. still from a color film in Super 16 mm, 102 minutes. Cherie Currie (Dakota Fanning) and Joan Jett (Kristen Stewart).

on YouTube, setting up perfect karaoke opportunities for her actors. Her film wants to do its job properly and doesn’t play around. In this way, it closes in on its subject, closing it down. But the Runaways have been revisited before, and differently—by the band Redd Kross, whose excellent first LP, *Born Innocent* (1982), included an ode to Runaways lead guitarist Lita Ford, and in the Super 8 films of Dave Markey (*Desperate Teenage Lovedolls* [1984] and *Lovedolls Superstar* [1986]), which parodied the all-girl phenomenon and featured music by Redd Kross. These Californian post-punks reappropriated and perverted the already perverse local culture (Hollywood, the Manson Family, the Partridge Family, Russ Meyer films, themselves) to produce their own funny, sunny corpse in the Hills. But *The Runaways* avoids these joys of travesty and mistranslation, preferring to remain a manageable indie property marketed under the sign of emo sincerity. □

The Runaways opens nationally on March 19.

JOHN KELSEY IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM.

Riches to Rags

JOHN KELSEY ON RODARTE

THE HALLUCINATION that haunts an America in ruins is as mythic as ever: From these singed, frayed, distressed fragments, something emerges again, if not in life then as a sort of glamorous undeath, at least for a season. For the fashion-design team Rodarte, devastation always precedes construction. Informed by the postinferno landscapes of Southern California and the dilapidated, foreclosed properties along the 110 freeway connecting LA to Pasadena, by echoes of the Dust Bowl and the horror films they won't stop watching, Kate and Laura Mulleavy are drawn to the ruins of the present, or to the present as ruin. This past winter at the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum in New York, on the former Carnegie mansion's second-floor landing and in what is still referred to as the Billiard Room, seventeen gray mannequins displayed samples from Rodarte's previous four fashion seasons, during which the Mulleavy sisters emerged as the most acclaimed female designers of their generation. An abbreviated yet potent survey of their recent work, the show consisted of garments pulled from the designers' own archive and presented on crude sets devised (by Matthew Mazzucca) to look like half-demolished rooms.

Known for their DIY approach to design (neither sister received formal training in the craft or business of fashion), Rodarte attack materials at the molecular level, devising ways of transforming and combining them into strange, unorthodox complexes—"vinyl bird-

Rodarte are perhaps closer in spirit to Roger Corman or Wes Craven than to the top men of haute couture.

skin," "wool cobweb," "metallic mohair," and so on—before submitting the results to an intensely labored reconstructive surgery—*cum*—couture. The research-and-development phase of their process may involve fraying a material with pinking shears, hand-dyeing it, or burning fabric with acid or a cigarette lighter before elaborating the labyrinths of knit loops, Frankensteinian assemblages, and multilayered architectures that fit on bodies. Sometimes criticized for an indifference to structure or for a certain inarticulateness that accompanies their wizardry with materials, Rodarte, we could



View of "Quicktake: Rodarte," 2010, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, New York. Photo: Carmel Wilson.

argue, relocate design in the fingertips, the eyeballs, and that part of the brain most exposed to and shaken by the world—away from the more academic, silhouette-oriented values that rule the traditional houses of Europe. And it is not just in terms of what the late film critic Manny Farber called "termite art" ("it goes always forward eating its own boundaries, and, likely as not, leaves nothing in its path other than the signs of eager, industrious, unkempt activity") that we can identify Rodarte's aesthetic as American, but in all the improvisatory ways it de- and recodes a culture that is already impure and blended with crisis. If the typically European strategy is to construct avant-garde gestures around the inversion of established, legible codes (aristocratic or bourgeois), an American vernacular is corrupt in advance, the border between high and low long since dissolved. Here, it is less about turning the queen on her head than a matter of tracking mutations in the desert, where celebrity and nothingness have always shared a strangely productive cohabitation. Rodarte are perhaps closer in spirit to Roger Corman or Wes Craven than to the top men of haute couture.

Based on a narrative of a woman burned alive in the desert who returns as a California condor, Rodarte's spring 2010 collection involved serpentine braiding and weaving of hand-tooled leather strips, macramé and crochet with black yarn and feathers, bandagelike swaths of dyed cheesecloth, and belts fastened with

bird-claw clasps. The dresses had a charred, post-traumatic look, assembled as if from tatters, their coal and tar-pit blacks punctuated by glints of silver and Swarovski crystals. A new fabric designed by Rodarte for Knoll also looked both scorched and glimmering, and samples of this material were mashed—along with several pairs of black leather and "acid-treated zombie vein" heels—into the dark rubble of the installation. These erotically charged garments and their models were engulfed in clouds of toxic-yellow smoke at their New York runway show last September, emerging for brief glimpses as if from a nuclear test site.

Fog and cement grays dominated the fall/winter 2009 collection, creating a blanked-out atmosphere at times sliced through by harsh glints of emerald-green lamé. A marbled leather jacket evoked shifting slabs of stone, cinched tight and low, its narrow arms bound by a series of python-trimmed straps. Some dresses featured turbulent architectures of knit wool, whose varying densities and degrees of fuzz produced thundercloud-like volumes that were echoed by the installation's burst drywall. Others, more tuniclike, combined crisscrossed sections of silver metallic laminated silk, hand-marbled leather and silk tulle, printed chiffon and lamé. A single pair of Rodarte's famously fetishized wrap-on, thigh-high boots (designed by Nicholas Kirkwood for the label) was semiburied in Sheetrock dust in the back of the installation. Lighter and more



Clockwise from top: View of "Quicktake: Rodarte," 2010, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, New York. Photo: Carmel Wilson. View of "Quicktake: Rodarte," 2010, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, New York. From left: Platform shoes by Nicholas Kirkwood for Rodarte, spring 2009 collection; platform shoes by Christian Louboutin for Rodarte, fall 2008 collection. Photo: Carmel Wilson. Rodarte's spring 2010 collection runway show, New York, September 15, 2009. Photo: Dan and Corina Lecca.

ethereal, the fall 2008 and spring 2009 seasons included dresses layered with embroidered lace, silk tulle, and soft webs of looped mohair, as well as metallic mohair tights, in hues ranging between rusty pinks and corroded, coppery oranges. The airy, soft-spun shimmer and metallic frizz of these hand-knit confections were grounded by hand-cut leather leggings whose angular brise-soleil patterns suggest urban security gates. Fastened to the floor with copper wire and screws, a pair of platform shoes (again, Kirkwood for Rodarte) made of "mirror leather," metal, and electrical wire glinted with a mosaic of golden mirror shards.

Rodarte absorbed the seismic energies of recent natural and economic disasters, working these into dazzling, one-of-a-kind luxury products, but, strangely,

with no *body* in mind. Fashion designers—usually men—tend to begin with an ideal or particular woman whom they aim to dress and beautify. But the Mulleavy sisters—like David Cronenberg's twin gynecologists in *Dead Ringers*, whose diabolical medical instruments conform to the body of no known patient—have not yet determined whom or what they are dressing. These are garments produced in advance of their wearers. An open question: Where, and to whom, does a dress belong? Dressing no one, Rodarte address their designs to an abstract condition. The Mulleavys' alchemical experiments and gothic ornamentations surround a scorched void, a potential or perhaps impossible woman, a body provisionally occupied by stand-ins such as Kim Gordon, Kirsten Dunst, and Michelle

Obama. In the mahogany-paneled Cooper-Hewitt, Rodarte's constructions challenged viewers to locate themselves in relation to the burned-out yet obsessively labored glamour the Mulleavys are proposing.

This winter, a line of Rodarte products designed for Target quickly came and went, torn from the racks by fans who can't afford the Rodarte-label garments so prized by Anna Wintour and other arbiters of fashion value. Collaborations between top designers and mass-market distributors are like ghosts of the former's concentrated runway visions, conceived under extreme constraints. Factory-made, using the cheapest materials and the most cost-efficient production methods, these are aimed at an actually locatable nobody: the average American shopper. Most impressive in Rodarte's cross-over effort was that, rather than attempting to translate their detail-oriented craftsmanship and alchemical experimentation into mass products, they simply made good-looking, accessible clothes for kids and managed to keep their idiosyncratic brand legible within a super-market context.

Moving between Target and the Cooper-Hewitt, between DIY techniques and commercial collaboration, between rag-picking forays in the desert and the runways of the metropolis, the Rodarte label is itself like one of those border towns built around a constant renegotiation of exclusion and inclusion, of the local and the alien. The conditions seem right for the success of an approach like that of the Mulleavy sisters, whose personal, intuitive aesthetic, had it been operative in the 1990s, would most likely have remained cornered in some culty style ghetto. Yet we can't be sure that the usual trajectory of an up-and-coming fashion label will apply to Rodarte—that their brand will expand or they will end up designing for one of the established European houses, for example. Capturing the energy and undecidability of this moment, the Cooper-Hewitt, which has also named Rodarte finalists in its 2009 National Design Award competition, afforded viewers an opportunity to encounter the Mulleavys' singular vision up close and in a sort of freeze-frame. Not art, fashion prefers to haunt art. More mobile and exposed, in certain ways fashion remains the more effective means of processing the chaos of the present, probably because, as a socio-cultural mediator, it is itself already highly mediated and because, while sticking close to the body, it is ever so responsive to how quickly the ground shifts under its acid-treated zombie-vein heels. □

JOHN KELSEY IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM.



Left: Jimmie Durham, *Self-Portrait Pretending to Be a Stone Statue of Myself*, 2006, color photograph, 39½ x 26¼". Right: Christopher Williams, *Untitled (Study in Red)* Dirk Schaper Studio, Berlin, April 30th, 2009, color photograph, 28 x 25¼".

Installed in many homes, the Minitel was France's first glimpse of pervasive communication. Letting its users chat with one another, make online purchases, train reservations, check stock prices, search the telephone directory, and have a mail box. In Virginie Despentes' novel *Fuck Me*, set in the French banlieues (before a killing spree takes the characters on a voyage) one of them has a revelation, ignited by a ringing phone, minutes after she strangles her roommate. *"The phone has always seemed hostile and menacing to her. No way of knowing who's calling or why. Always the same ring, whatever the news is. The feeling that people on the outside are trying to keep an eye on her, track her down right to her place and let her know that they can get in when they want. Now she's done something that makes the fear of telephones a reality. All those stupid worries, that low rumble of fear. That feeling of being left out. All those familiar things that had no meaning for her. Well, now she's done what was needed to make her reality and the reality of others coincide a little better."*

BADEN-BADEN, GERMANY

Christopher Williams

STAATLICHE KUNSTHALLE BADEN-BADEN
June 12–August 29
Curated by Karola Kraus

This summer, the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden will present "Program. For Example: Dix-Huit Leçons Sur La Société Industrielle (Revision 11)," a large-scale survey of recent work by the Conceptual artist Christopher Williams. Sound familiar? This is because Williams has been re-presenting variations on the same core set of photographs in successive shows and catalogues since 2005, always recycling the same exhibition title. But each instance of his "Program" is a fresh revision of the material, usually supplemented with one or two new images, often drastically reorganized to address the historical and institutional specificities of the site it engages. So, one more time, with feeling: The plastic corncobs, the shower girls, the jellyfish, the Kiev 88 camera—all appropriate the codes of advertising, ethnographic, and architectural photography, inflecting these with an intriguing tension between technical precision and staged disturbance.

—John Kelsey

On a sunny afternoon in the park the young girl joined me with whiskey, and climbed on my lap while I recounted how as a teenager an opossum died in my backyard. I'd made a habit of visiting the corpse daily. It was in the beginning of autumn and the coolness slowed down putrefaction denying me the irruption of flesh and crawling maggots. But I was compensated for weeks with an almost imperceptible degeneration. Eventually the skin on the cheeks withered around the bone as the muscle and fats leaked into the soil or evaporated. Her petit posterior gracefully adjusted, I paused, and looking down at the many holes in her torn black stockings contemplated putting a finger in. Eventually the body was just a matted patch of hair, and I had contracted the uncanny ability to see reification. As I finished my story she was dappled by the sun—about a dog I had whose face was equine, and every time I would look at the pup I would see the opossum. Eventually I just gave the dog away—she was too far along and besides an old woman used to call nagging for her.

One evening she came over and we sat on my bed and watched *Lovely Andrea*, Hito Streyer's film about Japanese bondage. When the UBU web stream stalled, I brought us sliced oranges and strawberries, and we discussed the term *radical localism* from a kelly green Chris Kraus book I'd been given the week before. At an impasse we didn't so much as consent that the precarity of restraint was tedious, but began clumsily removing our round glasses, as our bodies drew in, pulling off one another's clothing.

Instantaneously I saw her turn from trinkets of self-contained imagery to squiggling desire. In the bulge of her pelvis, I found, a whirlwind of hair and torrents of laughter. And at the moment her torso rose, I sunk my fingers into the shallow pocket of her vulva.

Afterwards, to invade the quietness of her breaths, I paused at the tip of my tongue on her teeth, and as I drew in I felt her smile unlacing our bounds.

Lost in Space

JOHN KELSEY ON TIM BURTON'S ALICE IN WONDERLAND

WHEN THE CHESHIRE CAT'S disembodied head comes unmoored from the picture plane and, like a ball in oil, begins to roll in our RealD glasses, it asks through its floating grin whether Alice is really *the* Alice. We are actually watching two movies when we watch 3-D, thanks to a "circularly polarizing" technology that involves splitting the projected light into two series of rapidly alternating images—a right-eye image that circles clockwise, like the cat's head, and a left-eye image that circles counterclockwise; 3-D glasses with oppositely circularly polarized lenses ensure that each eye can see only one image. Plunked onto the picture's CGI ground is Mia Wasikowska, the live-action actress playing an Alice who's once again losing track of both her direction and her identity, this time in the visual woods of Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*, which has been loosely adapted from Lewis Carroll's books *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. No longer a child, in this version Alice returns to the site of her original adventures as a nineteen-year-old who has fallen back down the rabbit hole on the very day of her wedding engagement. And Wonderland, it turns out, is actually called Underland—on her first visit, as a seven-year-old, she had misheard the word. Meanwhile, during her twelve-year absence, Underland has been festering in a sort of depression and is now

While "revolutionary" film technology allows the hypermanagement and control of every square millimeter of screen space, we may miss the holes and gaps (in space and in meaning) movies once had.

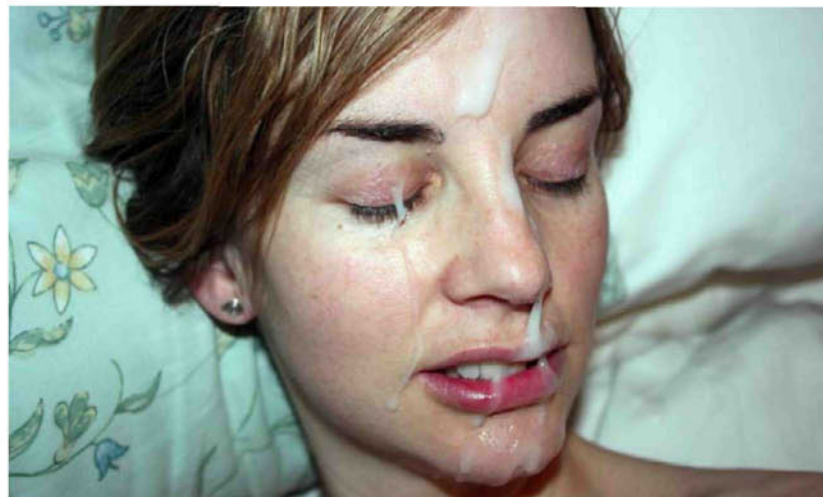
ruled by the tyrannical Red Queen (Helena Bonham Carter). Burton's *Alice* is a gothic, young-adult revision of Carroll's books via a complex amalgam of the latest digital filmmaking technologies. And Alice's job now is to keep her head and unseat this terrorist queen.

Given *Alice in Wonderland's* conceit of a teen's return to a lost and buried childhood, a sound track featuring Avril Lavigne's song "Alice" makes total sense,

helping to rescript the children's storybook as an angsty, emo-inflected self-help message. (In the end, Alice will regain control of her destiny, emerging from Underland to refuse a marriage proposal and launch herself as an independent businesswoman instead.) Carroll's popular

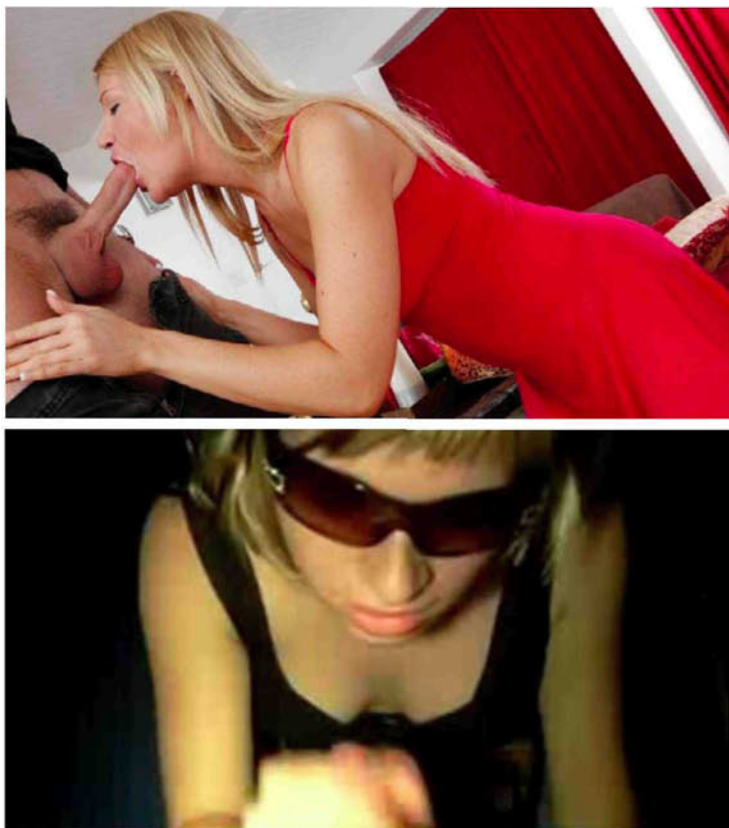
Alice books were the products of an age that was hugely invested in the idea of childhood, inventing complex, perverse topologies to navigate the enforced cultural split between childhood and adulthood on which Victorian England was based. Burton's Underland (like the fictive universes of *Edward Scissorhands* [1990] and his other films), on the contrary, reflects a contemporary world of never-ending adolescence, where adults and animals are teens, too. His Alice could easily be a character in *Harry Potter*, and *Alice* screenwriter Linda Woolverton seems to take many devices from the latter (and from the fantasy-adventure genre in general), basing her narrative on a good-versus-evil conflict, chases and battles with mean monsters, etc., while tying Alice's progress to the mastery of visual chaos (and of sword fighting) so that she can finally return victorious to her proper garden-party reality. So whereas Carroll's seven-year-old encounters the enchanting nonsense of adult institutional codes (discourse, lessons, logic, rules, etiquette) distorted in a looking glass, Burton's protagonist confronts something more like a fully saturated and operative media-space (which the film itself extends and inhabits) as a site of self-discovery and self-mastery. The new Alice is neither child nor adult; she is a *jeune fille* who struggles to integrate herself within a highly engineered image program (in order to be free!).

"Off with her head!" screams the Red Queen, whose own head has been filmed separately with an ultrahigh-resolution camera so that when magnified to several times its original size and pasted back onto her now slightly reduced body it looks seamless, its pixels



Tim Burton, *Alice in Wonderland*, 2010, still from a color video converted to 3-D, 108 minutes. From left: The Mad Hatter (Johnny Depp), Alice (Mia Wasikowska), and the White Queen (Anne Hathaway).

no larger than the others. So the queen's head is both off and on. Carroll's books include jokes about heads, too: Alice is told that she can travel Wonderland by mail, since she has a head and so do postage stamps. In the film, digitally enhanced heads are frequently "stitched" onto live-action bodies and vice versa: Crispin Glover's live-action head is glued to a body stretched to nearly seven feet tall, and the Mad Hatter (Johnny Depp) sports a head rigged with inhumanly large green eyes. These hybrid visuals are one of the ways by which Burton translates Alice's disorienting movements through the twisted topologies of Carroll's books. They are also the latest instance of the director's ongoing pursuit of a designer image in which humans and cartoons trade places or finally lose their distinction. With 3-D (Burton shot the film in 2-D and later transferred it to 3-D), heads are allowed to float and roll not only free of bodies but (as if) freed from the screen. Yet if the movie screen has become a sort of looking glass through which Burton's characters can pass in occasional sequences, dancing disembodied in the space between our polarized eyeballs and our brains, why do we remain so disenchanted throughout the experience? One reason is that the stretched-out space of IMAX 3D is not at all infinite: It feels as though the screen space has extra depth now, but we only seem to gain about twenty or thirty immersive feet on either side of the usual rectangle. It's like an oversize, animated pop-up book. Also, the depth of field in most shots seems somehow squashed, and all the CGI-generated and baroquely ornamented forests and waterfalls seem a little dim and soft in focus behind the bodies that



Tim Burton, *Alice in Wonderland*, 2010, still from a color video converted to 3-D, 108 minutes. From top: The Red Queen (Helena Bonham Carter). The Cheshire Cat (voice by Stephen Fry).

occupy the frame's center. (What work best in 3-D are flat, graphic logos—for instance, the IMAX logo itself.)

A recent formula in cinema has been the casting of relatively inexpensive, nonmarquee actors whose performances become the bases for multimillion-dollar "digital puppets": Andy Serkis played Gollum in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001–2003), Zoe Saldana was the female lead in *Avatar* (2009), and so on. At this point, movie extras can be almost entirely done away with, especially in blurry battle scenes where detail isn't so noticeable. Virtual actors are being painstakingly concocted on computer screens, and technology now allows both the reanimation of dead talent (whose images can be licensed through a company called GreenLight) and the cloning of younger versions of "aged, aged" actors (a spry Jeff Bridges will return in the upcoming *Tron: Legacy*) through the scanning of earlier films' frames and their subsequent reprocessing via digital-animation programs. In other words, the boundary between animation and live performance is quickly dissolving, and we are already hearing terms like "virtual performance" and "virtual camera," already watching seamless hybrids at work in films like *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* [2008]. With the plotting of live-action facial performances onto head-shaped digital grids, the insertion of

motion-captured gestures into virtual camera movements and CGI environments (*Avatar*), or the building of these from the raw, dead material of digital scans, the "shoot" is no longer what (or when) it used to be. Most of what normally happens on set is in these cases generated later by programmers and animators on banks of hard drives that cost more than the actors. The industry term "uncanny valley" describes the disturbing effect of an animation that looks all too human but nevertheless lacks life—like a mobile corpse. Once we master lighting effects and the subtlety of skin movement, however, the valley can be successfully crossed, some say.

But none of this wizardry can translate the systematic distortions of sense or the flat-out joys of Lewis Carroll's books (which are already so screenlike). Depp's performance, it should be noted, remains somehow faithful to Carroll's inventiveness: It is all on the surface and is generative of surfaces. Interpreting the hatter's madness as the spread of mercury poisoning, he plays mental deterioration out on the skin, communicating sudden mood shifts as a rapid shuffling of masks, via makeup, costume, and abrupt changes of accent in his speech. Mostly working against green screens, Depp manages to tap Carrollian speed: His solution is to become a screen himself. But the surface speeds on which the literary adventure depends are otherwise lost in the film.

While "revolutionary" film technology allows the hypermanagement and control of every square millimeter of screen space, we may miss the holes and gaps (in space and in meaning) movies once had. Cutting is not so easy in 3-D: The images have to be melded and synthesized, and rapid or hard edits (as with sudden shifts in depth of field) disturb the viewer's experience of immersion. So we are losing the differences and intervals between images, too, and movies forget to breathe or think as they once did. It's now a matter of compositing multiple layers (live and animated), performances, and shoots to produce a single, seamless

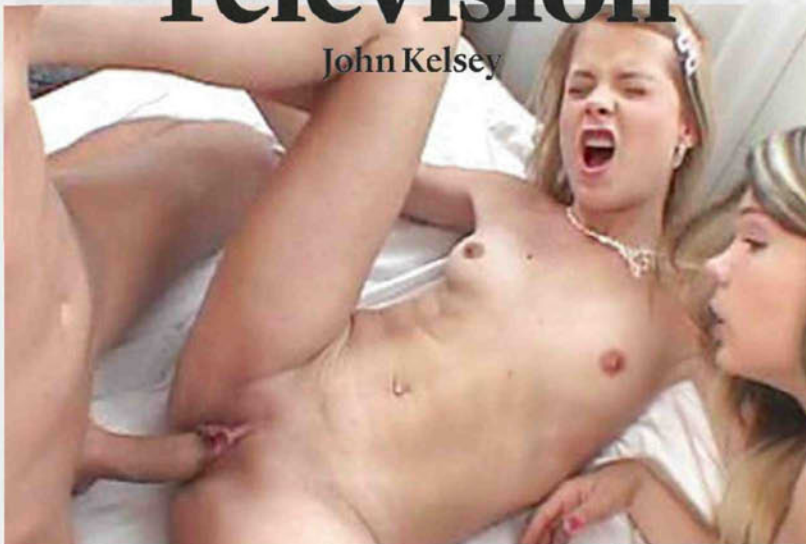
sequence, and this requires many slow months of work by roomfuls of technicians. There is no end to shooting: Once the performances have been "captured," they can be endlessly reshot after the fact, with virtual cameras. Virtual cameras have no lenses; they are programs used to re-angle and recompose raw performances on the computer, and these can also be layered onto CGI bodies or backgrounds and inserted into pans, zooms, or tracking shots that are all digitally constructed in what was once called postproduction. But there is no more postproduction, because there is no longer a defined time and space of production. And if there is no established set, then neither is there an off-set (and therefore no exit from work, or "performance"). As movies attempt to move offscreen, too, seeming to colonize and fill this "other," unrepresentable space that films once produced in an erotic and dynamic relation to the on-screen image (the space of performance), we wonder what happens to seduction. It seems impossible to imagine an erotics of full immersion and full-time programming.

Carroll was a "logician with a taste for children," an upstanding representative of the institutional order (as a lecturer in mathematics at Oxford) in relation to which his experimental nonsense was elaborated. His perversion involved luring proper little girls into the comedy of meaning, enchanting them with double and contradictory interpretations of both words and social codes, with anarchic games of cultural decoding and recoding. Burton submits his Alice to the pure power of the code, and every displacement has been programmed. When Alice grows and shrinks, he shows her slipping into and out of her variously scaled dresses, a sort of programmed, 3-D (PG) striptease. How much stranger and more perverse were the light-sensitive photographic plates that Carroll himself produced, posing his child subjects stock-still (as if dreaming) against the backgrounds of their Victorian homes and gardens. Burton moves his teen Alice through the film like a JPEG within a design program, submitting her to various manipulations and mobilizations. What we get on-screen is a young woman successfully coming to grips with the program how to finally (endlessly) put herself to work. □

JOHN KELSEY IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM.

The Year in Television

John Kelsey



Tina Fey in the "Brownie Husband" sketch on NBC's *Saturday Night Live*, April 10, 2010.

Left: Cast of MTV's *Jersey Shore*.

Below: Still from HBO's *True Blood*. Sookie Stackhouse (Anna Paquin) and Claudine (Lara Pulver).

pravotube.net
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Left: Still from AMC's *Breaking Bad*. Walter White (Bryan Cranston).

THIS YEAR we watched even more television at work, usually in the form of YouTube clips—if we weren't streaming entire episodes on Netflix, Hulu, or sites operated by the networks themselves. Such moments of pseudosabotage of the traditional working day now merge seamlessly with that other engine of post-Fordist productivity: gossip. "Did you see Tina Fey's 'Brownie Husband' sketch on *SNL* last night? Here, watch!" Or, "Did you hear Jeffrey Deitch got trampled at his own opening? Check it out!" TV is a weaker, less concentrated, and at the same time more dispersed and omnipresent signal than it was back in 1983, when Mike Kelley made a performance video based on memories of his grade school classmates' gossip about a *Captain Kangaroo* char-

acter the kids were all obsessed with. Kelley never actually saw any of the *Banana Man* episodes, only experienced them vicariously as school-bus hearsay. Decades later, the feelings of social exclusion that came with the experience of always missing the *Banana Man* inspired his own "remake." These days, it's impossible to "miss" a show. TV flows as easily and constantly as any other information, and this year it became obvious that TV no longer has a specific room or time slot—it's whenever we want it, on our desks, in our pockets, or in bed, where sex can be endlessly deferred with back-to-back episodes of *True Blood*, *Mad Men*, or *Breaking Bad*. Like the working day, the boundaries and the notion of the "channel" have been overflowed. We don't

The *Deepwater Horizon* spill as seen on TV, 2010.



just watch TV, we send and receive it, gather and organize it on our personal touch screens, meanwhile interacting with sites to produce, wittingly or not, the consumer feedback that helps broadcasters determine a season's programming (if TV still even thinks in terms of seasons).

Nowadays television networking includes the cyber-networking whereby viewer behavior becomes instantly productive of televisual information. "Video on demand" and "instant viewing" are also a kind of voting or data production, and TV becomes a near-instantaneous loop between producer and consumer, fulfilling Marshall McLuhan's prophecy of a "cool," tactile, and participatory medium that involves us in the "depth" of its very process. As

McLuhan said, the real content of a medium is not the programming it delivers, not what's "on" TV; it's us, the viewers who use it. Once we surpass a certain threshold of participation, however, we begin to wonder if TV is still TV, or if it hasn't mutated into another, hybrid medium with enhanced powers to organize life. Abandoning its specificity and its channels, in other words, TV better adapts itself to the "constant partial attention" of today's info user.

The year's most fascinating TV image by far was the "live feed" of the BP oil spill. Throughout the summer, as *Deepwater Horizon* leaked ninety-five thousand barrels per day into the Gulf of Mexico, BP's own ROV (remotely operated vehicle) cameras transmitted real-time deep-sea surveillance of the worst environmental disaster in US history, and anyone could watch via a BP-hosted link on the Internet. Shots of oil-smearred birds could never involve us in catastrophe like this. With the live feed, information had finally found its own, perfect image: an apocalyptic money shot, a megabudget vision of flow *as such*, just muck on the move, wasting everything. This was TV beyond TV, in all its scatological fluidity, involving and absenting us at the same time, outflowing the talking heads that tried to speak on its behalf—Obama's, FEMA spokespeople's, consecutive BP CEOs', and all the ruined local fishermen's. No expression of human sentiment, no voice of reason or heartfelt apology, could ever make (or stop) such TV from the center of the earth. And as BP was losing

public confidence and trust, it was at the same time gaining viewers, producing them, actually, as extensions of the company's cool ROV cams.

This year also marked the Obama administration's loss of control of the national debate and the rise of the Tea Party as an irrational, TV-mediated force (or TV Party). Fox's Glenn Beck and other cable showmen outcooled the president by producing TV that tapped populist dread (of economic collapse, of immigrants, of communism, etc.) while flooding the networks and blogs with dizzying levels of gossip. Beck went so far as to summon his white zombie viewership to the National Mall on the anniversary of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, cynically equating televisual participation with civil rights-era activism. His Washington rally (which, just before the midterm elections, was parodied by Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert's "Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear") was also a sort of TV beyond TV, a diabolical form of street theater that released television from its normal channel while, paradoxically, giving body to the populist longing for containment. Bringing America a message without a message, mixing fear and flow, Beck made himself an extension of what is darkest and most irrational in mediation, setting the terms of the debate from the point where debate becomes impossible.

The most talked-about TV personality of the year was probably Snooki of MTV's *Jersey Shore*. She's a cuter, more huggable type of oil spill, with



Stills from Bravo's *Work of Art: The Next Great Artist*.



From top: YouTube screen shot taken from the Fox News Channel show *Glenn Beck*. Glenn Beck addressing the crowd during the "Restoring Honor" rally at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, DC, August 28, 2010. Photo: Nikki Kahn/Getty Images.



Snooki from MTV's *Jersey Shore*.

Once we surpass a certain threshold of participation, we begin to wonder if TV is still TV, or if it hasn't mutated into another, hybrid medium with enhanced powers to organize life.

her spray tan, her plume of hair, and her bubbly, alcohol-fueled chatter. On reality TV shows like this, gossip is the driving force, intensified by the participants' enclosure within a single house with nothing to do but party, make out, and talk about it. Nothing really happened beyond the nonstop leaking of personal information, and we followed the show as a sort of embodied Twitter feed. In one episode, Snooki was in a cybercafé composing a letter that would incriminate Ronnie for cheating on Sammi, and it was strange to witness her writing, carefully weighing her words before printing them out. The guys' pumped, shirtless gym bodies were always draped with slender microphone wires, suggesting another type of thong, or surveillance lingerie. Meanwhile, in Texas, the artist Chivas Clem produced a series of "Jersey Shore" paintings using spray-on tanning fluid instead of paint, and framing such telesexual details as the Situation's abs, JWoww's bust, and of course Snooki's "pouf."

Artists frequently translate and appropriate TV, and TV took its revenge this year with Bravo's *Work of Art: The Next Great Artist*, a reality show that chronicled the passage of a few young people through a brief series of creative challenges judged by professional critics and dealers. The show has already been widely discussed and blogged about in art-world circuits, and those debates about the show's merits and crimes seemed to prove that an art-world nerve had been touched by TV. *Work of Art* demonstrated McLuhan's claim that the low-definition yet participatory medium of TV works best when it involves us in a process. But what disturbed us was the fact that when their creative powers are translated to TV, artists are really no different than housewives, next top models, survivors, or Snooki. The "best" artists were the ones with the fewest psychological or aesthetic issues about being exposed and broadcast, not just as artists but as people. Finalists survived by going with the flow, freely giving themselves (and their art) over to the judges, the cameras, and the terrorizing logic of the program. (Jerry, you didn't seem to realize that televised art criticism is just more Snooki-speak, but your *New York* magazine reports from inside the program were good media gossip.)

Another noteworthy cross-wiring of art and TV in 2010 was actor James Franco's attempt to elaborate a conceptual practice around the use of his own TV presence and persona. First, he got himself hired to play the insane artist "Franco" on the soap opera *General Hospital* (also organizing an appearance on the show by performance artist Kalup Linzy, whose work frequently quotes and deconstructs the soap genre). Then in June, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles allowed *GH* to tape an episode at



Above: James Franco during the shooting of an episode of *General Hospital* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, June 24, 2010. Photo: Stefanie Kennan/Wire Image.

Right: James Franco plays "Franco" on ABC's *General Hospital*.

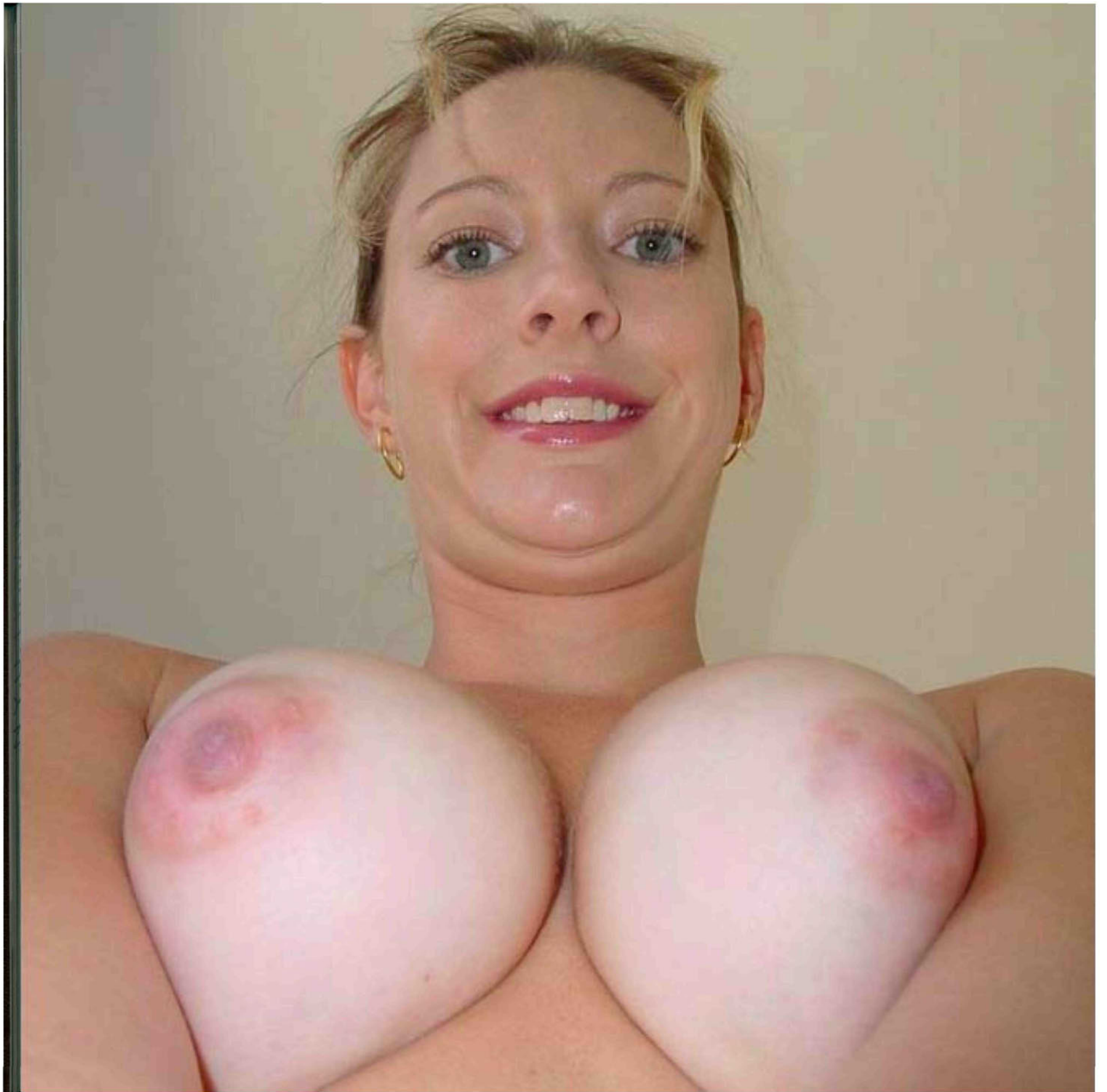
the institution as part of Franco's exhibition "Soap at MOCA." The actor's suave moves between the TV studio and the museum did not exactly produce a feeling of transgression or vertigo, however. Warhol on *Love Boat* was one thing, but all Franco really demonstrated is that becoming an artist isn't so hard, even an actor can do it, and that everything is already a lot like TV, even art, even TV. It would have been much stranger to see him show up on *Work of Art* than in a museum at this point, because, like Andy Kaufman and Crispin Glover before him, it's Franco's conceptual moves as an *actor* that are most interesting.

Now there's a new ad for a product called Apple TV. It shows a sleek puck of black plastic cupped in the palm of a human hand. Imprinted with the Apple logo, this object is mysteriously minimal and opaque. What is it? Not an antenna and not a screen. A better-looking converter box? It's an image of TV as a bar of designer soap, a magic stone, or a lump of coal that we touch and that endows its user with cooler, even more abstracting powers of fluidity and extension: iCoal. □

JOHN KELSEY IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM.



Advertisement for Apple TV.



VENICE '11

The Ignorant Schoolmaster

JOHN KELSEY

DID THE VERSION OF THE "OPEN WORK" we inherited from relational aesthetics ever suspect that it was already infected with a pathological possibility, that the office without walls and the convivial zone of the project could also be spaces of violence and death? If the installation was the aesthetic form best suited to a spreading, cybercapitalist nowhere, it probably shared Empire's inability to spatialize otherness as anything but an avenging, antiproduktive suicide from beyond or to invent intimacies besides the socially scripted, always already mediated encounters of the laptop screen. It seemed there was no escaping the soft, spreadable new space of contemporary art and its hyperproductive demand: Was the artwork too open, or not yet open enough? In any case, every "Utopia Station" eventually begins to dream of its own aesthetic Columbine.

As part of Norway's representation at this year's Venice Biennale, the artist Bjarne Melgaard and a team of local art students occupied a palazzo at a noticeable remove from the Giardini and its national pavilions. "Baton Sinister," a group exhibition not so much curated as topped by Melgaard, was the culmination of a study workshop he'd been leading throughout the spring at the Università IUAV di Venezia: "Beyond Death: Viral Discontents and Contemporary Notions About AIDS." When was the last time an artist talked about AIDS? Maybe the reason it seems so strange to call AIDS "contemporary" is that so much of the culture we're living now arose in reaction to that panic. We wanted to be connected, and to forget about death. We wanted to get back to work and to put euphoria to work too. Preferring to confront the ways that fear continues to shape and

distort our culture today, Melgaard reappropriates terror as both an aesthetic device and a means of countering the productive efficiency of social networks. The Palazzo Contarini Corfù's trashed, cluttered rooms were plastered floor to ceiling with graffiti, posters, and slogans, as if some kind of AIDS-obsessed, pope-hating, possibly ultra-left-wing cult had been squatting it. A hulking, brooding "Professor" Melgaard figured in paintings by one of the students. Another painting announced the glaring absence of the Black Liberation Army from the Biennale. One room was filled with rotting bananas. There was information about barebacking and bug chasers, who intentionally receive loads of HIV-infected cum in order to experience a radical intimacy with the other. The press release insisted that art could never change anything.

View of "Baton Sinister," 2011, an exhibition by Bjarne Melgaard and students, Palazzo Contarini Corfù, Venice. Photo: Guilio Squillacciotti.





From left: View of "Baton Sinister," 2011, an exhibition by Bjarne Melgaard and students, Palazzo Contarini Corfù, Venice. Photo: Corinne Mazzoli. Paola Angellini, *We: I and Me: He and She*, 2011, oil on canvas, 69 x 61". Installation view, Palazzo Contarini Corfù, Venice. From "Baton Sinister."

Bjarne Melgaard's "Baton Sinister" can be seen as a brutal, happy catastrophe of relational aesthetics.

Here, pedagogy is a rampant, disorderly space of infection, where untimely or disavowed knowledge returns not as education but as the destabilizing possibility of social and ethical contamination. Directing our attention back to the late urban culture of the 1980s, when pre-relational practices such as transgressive literature, sex workerism, punk feminism, s/m, and "death porn" captivated the Foucault-reading brains and bodies of downtown Manhattan and San Francisco, Melgaard at the same time performs a sort of archaeology of the present, tracing the lineage of a gay terrorist movement that never happened. Asking why we missed the boat, Melgaard shows no love for the white-collar activism of ACT UP or for the legalization of gay marriage. The manic antagonism that drives his practice is steeped in a melancholic vision of the way contemporary culture absorbs and neutralizes any insurrectional desire almost instantly. So he's made an installation against installations, founded on a workshop about death,



and opened up a speculative space—under the sign of the baton sinister, a medieval heraldic emblem signifying illegitimacy—that abandons all hope of integration within neoliberal society, as well as any fear of the end of neoliberalism's normalizing humanism. (See the artist's website, www.terroraddict.com.)

The show's centerpiece is a video interview with cultural theorist Leo Bersani (*Untitled [Bjarne Melgaard Interviews Leo Bersani]*, 2011), playing on a big flat-screen beneath an antique Murano-glass chandelier. Known for his essay "Is the Rectum a Grave?" (1987) and for his studies on the forfeiture of experimentalism by a gay culture that's become increasingly focused on issues of rights, Bersani appears in a gray suit opposite Melgaard in this *Charlie Rose*-like encounter. He sidesteps the artist's themes of terrorism and bashing back against the hetero oppressor, preferring to speak about the invention of new "modes of intimacy" and embracing social and political "illegitimacy" as a first step toward resisting the dictates and assumptions of heteronormative society. As if to underline the impossibility of intimacy within the space of the TV interview, Melgaard has trashed this, too, making digital cocks sprout out of his and Bersani's on-screen bodies, splattering the video with lewd, orgasmic cybergraffiti, and interrupting the conversation with lowbrow bursts of dated MTV, the final murder scene from *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, candy-colored intertitles (HATE FUCK, DIE IN ME, etc.), and other intrusive fragments. The mute face of the late artist David Wojnarowicz, his lips stitched closed with thread (Silence = Death), flickers in and out of the talk show.

"Baton Sinister" starts from an aesthetics of impotence and impoverishment as theorized by Bersani but pushes these ideas into an aggressive practice in which the form of the installation begins to communicate with a politics of occupation. Melgaard is the "ignorant schoolmaster" who knows that knowledge is like a cock that can be taken in any number of ways, from behind or below or without permission. The exhibition can be seen as a brutally kitsch catastrophe of relational aesthetics: The open work rediscovers its own death drive, exposing us to the dead end of communication. At the missing center of the installation, the gay terrorist movement that never was stands in for everything that is already unworking the artwork, and for the limit this unworking exposes us to.

Meanwhile in Basel, the question of relational aesthetics and its continuing legacy returned with *Kopfbau!*, another sort of occupation, this time on the Messeplatz, in a building slated for demolition later this year. Organized by the "international network" and publisher e-flux, on a site immediately adjacent to the Art Basel fair, this intervention combined the productive promise of the symposium with the creative conviviality of the artist residency and featured the participation of live DJs and a group of students invited from the Städelschule in Frankfurt. On the occasion of this gathering, e-flux released *Are You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art*, a collection of essays by writers such as Diedrich Diederichsen, Lars Bang Larsen, Bifo, and Liam Gillick (who also showed up to film a segment of his ongoing "soap opera" *A Guiding Light*). I didn't experience any of this firsthand

(apart from poking my head into a DJ performance with a throbbing digital-video projection), so I'll quote from the press release:

... a constellation of projects situated somewhere between exhibitions of art and the concrete forms of sociality encountered in everyday life. Conceived as an independent universe with its own bar, hotel, shops, admissions, and so forth, this project operates in parallel, and as the inverse to the neighboring art fair: operating during alternative hours and in surprising and often paradoxical ways, and ranging in scope from the educational to playfully predatory and mercantile. Its component parts draw on a wide circle of institutions, artists, curators, and writers who have been involved with various e-flux projects over the past several years...

Kopfbau!'s playful announcement was a black card in the form of a fake Art Basel VIP badge, which arrived in the same packet as the real VIP card.

Doing what it does best, putting art professionals in touch and networking like mad while asking us to ask ourselves about the networking of art labor, e-flux, too, seemed to envision an installation to end all installations. Framing nothing besides post-Fordist bodies at work/play, *Kopfbau!* did not pretend to critique the fair next door (anyway, everyone working there is already a client and user of the network); it simply demonstrated that we ourselves, finally, are the real contemporary art product and encouraged us to get busy. These days, critical self-reflexivity in art functions mainly as a sign of connectedness, producing network-value and network-legitimacy. Redistributing current discourse on the networking of labor and knowledge, e-flux seems to want to be the meta-information of art, both the network and the idea of the network. But it is not clear how e-flux's extension of the art fair's hours into party time (doesn't this happen anyway?) generated any paradox or surprise in Basel, beyond the branding of the big *B* with a small, viral new *e*.

Recent reports that "random matrix theory," a mathematical tool for predicting the behavior of the stock market, is now being applied to AIDS research, confirm the suspicion that the chaos inside us is in no way separate from the cybercapitalist virus that's infected the rest of the metropolis. Like art, life is now a branch of economics. When, using this algorithmic predictor, we are finally able to reduce the noise of HIV, and the virus begins to communicate as information, new drugs will go to work. And then, perhaps inevitably, another death will find us. At a certain point, the artwork, like the body, finally resists communication, stops working. This is how the space of the work exposes us to its own limit, and ours. This is the intimacy at the end of the work. □

JOHN KELSEY IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF *ARTFORUM*.





Michael Beutler, *Sputnik 2005*. Installation view, Lenin Museum, Moscow, 2005.

the Moscow Biennale. There was a distinct sensation that there may in fact have been more than just one “contemporary” operating within the polymorphous event. Most intriguing of all was how the biennial managed to momentarily unhinge the image of the contemporary from itself, causing it to split and mimic itself from one exhibition to the next.

The biennial’s main show took place in the former Lenin Museum, which had been closed for the past twelve years, following Yeltsin’s moment and the extreme makeover of the city’s Soviet image. But the undead Lenin returned—sometimes nostalgically, sometimes ironically—in numerous artworks by Russians and Europeans alike. In *Little Men*, 2004–2005, a video installation by the Moscow-based Blue Noses group, the embalmed revolutionary—projected into a cardboard box—was shown tossing and turning in an eternally insomniac sleep. As part of her installation *Sleeplessness*, 2003/2005, Italian artist Micol Assaël recovered a portrait of Lenin from the museum’s basement and pinned it to the wall (along with an old movie poster for Tarkovsky’s *Solaris*). And then there was the curators’ decision to resurrect *Lenin Is Alive*, a reverential 1958 documentary film projected nonstop in a majestic room of its own, just as it always had been when the museum was still dedicated to Lenin.

The curators favored young artists and work that was in flux, still in the process of elaborating and testing its own strategies. Indeed, the most engaging work seemed to stumble into the show only half-made, keeping the question of its completion and function wide open. Assaël’s very in-progress *Sleeplessness*, for example, was a rough assemblage of humming gas compressors, metal and rubber tubing, smoke, windows opened onto the blizzard outside, stifling machine heat, and slowly accumulating, machine-made frost. The work was a theater of shifting microclimates, a musical arrangement of productive and wasted energies, an animated atmosphere of pure processes. German artist Michael Beutler contributed *Sputnik '05*, 2005, a device that, when cranked, unspooled strips of sheet metal, string, and colored ribbons, winding these into a single mysterious sort of building material, sections of which were cut, bent, and strewn throughout a marble hallway. Also present was the Austrian collective Gelatin, which contributed *Zapf de Pipi*, 2005, a wooden structure that allowed viewers to exit the museum through an upper-floor window into the subzero cold, in order to look at and contribute to a twenty-foot-long pee icicle. If, based on



Gelatin, *Zapf de Pipi*, 2005. Installation view, Lenin Museum, Moscow, 2005.

these works alone, we had to force a definition of the contemporary international aesthetic (and of the ways it contributes to reproducing the biennial format worldwide), it might be summed up as fascinated by the flexibility of its own frame, playfully self-displacing, as ludic as it is workaholic, spectacular in terms of its own processes, more programmed than authored. And as if poised to sabotage these qualities—or as if contemporary art were also capable of ending itself—there was former Radek Society member David Ter-Oganyan's *It Is Not a Bomb*, 2005: imitation explosive devices, which ticked disconcertingly on stairway landings and in random corners, uncomfortably close to other artists' works.

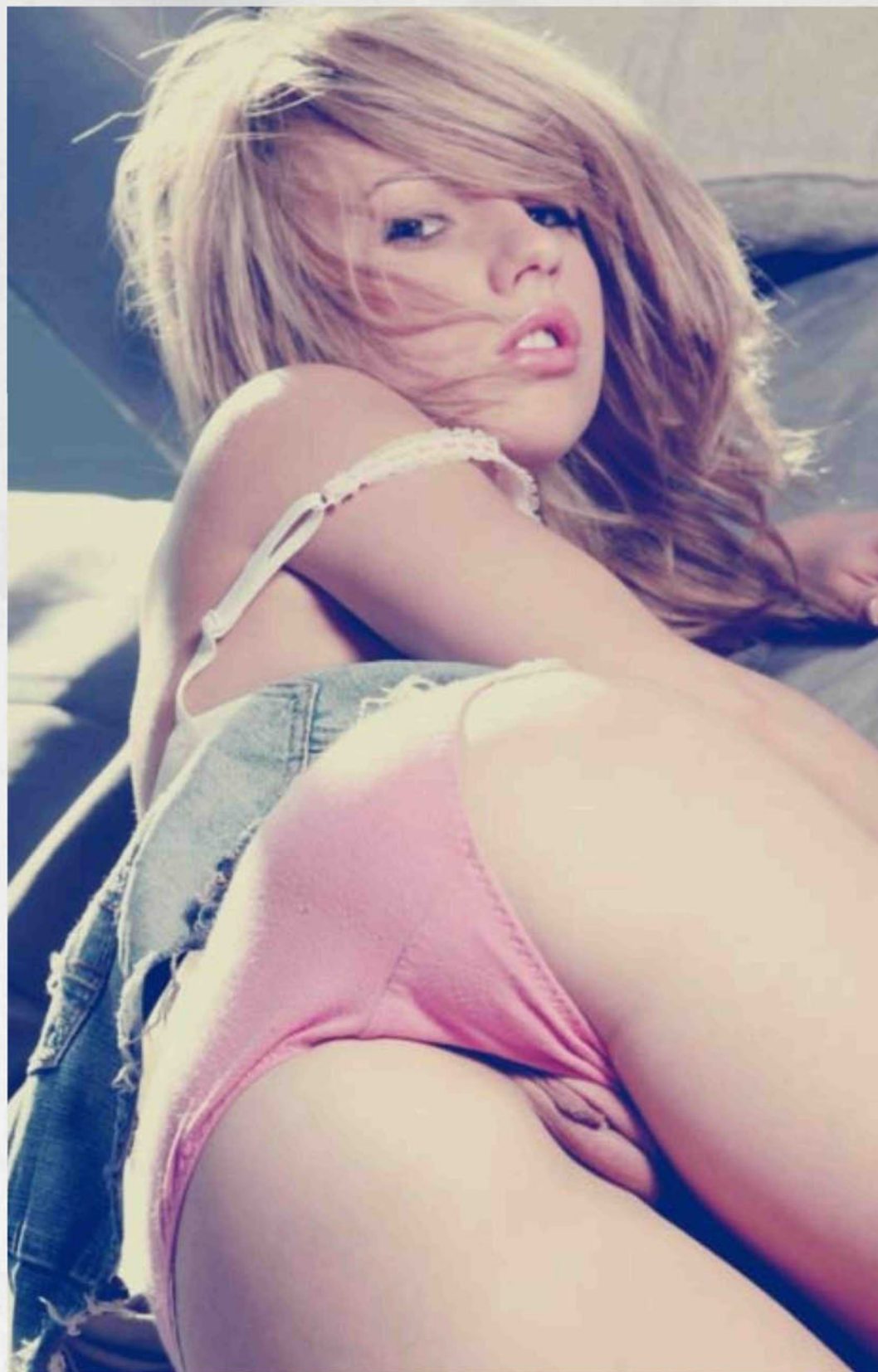
Among the biennial's twenty-five off-site special projects was "Starz" at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art, which gave slick, celebrity treatment (and an entire floor) to each of four still-active "elephants of art" who emerged here in the '90s: Oleg Kulik (appearing in a video as a human disco ball), drag-impersonator Vladislav Mamyshev-Monroe, staged-narrative photographers AES+F, and mock-Socialist Realist painters Vinogradov & Dubossarskiy. Moscow's own YRA generation, these media-savvy artists came up at



David Ter-Oganyan, *It Is Not a Bomb*, 2005, mixed media, dimensions variable.

a time when money, fame, and exposure were fresh options for a Russian artist, when Saatchi-esque sensations seemed to grow on trees, and though they may burn a little less brightly today, they will probably continue to shine here until the next big bang.

Then there was the exhibition "Russia 2," whose curators proposed something like a parallel universe (contemporary Russian art) positioned at a self-declared distance from what they called "Russia 1" (meaning power, the law, official society). The most demonstrative of the biennial's efforts to produce a local view of the contemporary, this show relied for its effect on a dubious splitting between the official and the underground, as if to resurrect the old division that once fueled all postrevolutionary dissident artists in this country, from the Collective Action Group to Ilya Kabakov. Included here were *This Work Has the Purpose of Stirring Up Religious Hatred*, 2004, by Advei Ter-Oganyan (David's son)—a superflat, candy-colored painting that cites Suprematist abstraction via the banality of contemporary



Oleg Kulik, *Madonna with Children (detail)*, 2004, mixed media, 12' 2" x 4' 8" x 9' 3".

... question wasn't which version was most adequate
... timely (it's all too obvious anyway) but how we
... might think about this discrepant simultaneity in a less-
... centralizing, less-programmed way. . . . If only a biennial
... could elaborate this gap, expand on and into it.

The strong presence of Soviet-era underground
... much of it produced collectively in small, local cir-
... between the '60s and '80s, introduced an extra ten-
... within the resolutely contemporary format of the
... international biennial: Surveys such as "Accomplices"
... and "Apartment Exhibitions. Yesterday and Today"
... researched entire secret histories of Moscow art, expos-
... ing intensified creative life-forms that once thrived at the
... risk of their proponents' imprisonment and without an
... official gallery support system. Such collectives demand
... to be understood in different terms than, say, "relational
... aesthetics," which proposes a model of "collaboration"
... between the artist, curator, and spectator by opening a
... supposed space of social interaction within the elastic
... confines of the institution and the marketplace. Both
... models elaborate ideas of ritualized participation,
... scripted situations, and play, as opposed to the produc-
... tion of complete objects to be passively consumed by
... interested though separated viewers. But there were no
... spectators of Soviet-era underground art: If you were
... there, you were necessarily a direct participant; you, too,
... were making it. A manifesto by the Collective Action
... Group (founded in 1975) states: "Our activities are spir-
... itual practice, but not art in any commercial sense. Each
... of our actions is a ritual with a purpose, namely to cre-
... ate an atmosphere of unanimity among the partici-
... pants." At first this may not seem all that different from
... curatorial statement by relational-aesthetics frontman
... Bournaud, but there is a crucial distinction between con-
... temporary projects based on professional collaboration
... and the unofficial group actions, total installations, and
... spontaneous, friends-only quasi institutions that char-
... acterized the apartment exhibitions, readings, and
... debates of the '60s through the '80s. For unlike the
... designer art hangouts and romanticized open networks
... of today, these earlier activities were in no way oriented
... toward creating standardized models adapted to exter-
... nal systems of reproduction and distribution. Docu-
... mentation of such collectively inhabited entities as
... Mukhomor (Toadstools Group), TOTART, and APTART
... in "Accomplices") presented something much closer to
... an antiprogram, precisely a refusal of what we mean by
... collaboration these days. The experience of viewing this
... compiled evidence in a museum filled with biennial
... spectators, or on a curated tour of re-created apartment
... exhibitions throughout the city, only increased the feel-
... ing of a nagging disconnect between these seemingly
... aligned models.

Conceived as a genealogical extension of those ear-
... lier groups, the more recent work of the Radek Society
... was presented at a ramshackle nonprofit space called

France Gallery. Video documentation of Radek actions
... such as *Demonstration*, 2002, attempted to translate a
... collective ethic to present-day Moscow, where free
... expression and critical intervention in the public domain
... are ostensibly authorized options. Filmed from across
... the street, incognito Radek members waited for a zom-
... bielike mass of rush-hour pedestrians to form at a
... Moscow crosswalk and then, as the light turned green,
... hoisted commie-red banners over the unsuspecting
... crowd of "protesters." Co-opting the programmed
... rhythms and docile bodies of the metropolis, this action
... hallucinated a revolutionary moment where it was least

young, contemporary art? The biennial and the liberal
... values it communicates, it is said, are being used as a
... public-relations tool by the right-leaning state in order
... to soften its own image and to disguise an increasingly
... fractured Russian society. International contemporary
... art is a highly instrumentalized system, and by its own
... playful strategies easily lends itself to the kinds of col-
... laborations and displacements that facilitate both social
... control and market efficiency. In Moscow, the limits of
... this tendency were exposed in the unexpected moments
... when the temporal plenitude of the contemporary didn't
... seem to agree with itself. Here, this first biennial—a sort



Radek Society, *Demonstration*, 2002, still from a color video, 5 minutes.

possible and least expected and momentarily confused
... an image of the contemporary with the untimely return
... of a radical collective desire. The overloaded slogan SEX
... MARX KARI. PISTOLS swims in one's eyes for a few sec-
... onds, refusing to cohere as a message in the same way
... that the "demonstration" resisted settling into an
... image of either protest or civil obedience—or, for that
... matter, art.

There were some real protests—notably by the
... movements currently organizing around the issue of
... government pensions—and a heightened police presence
... on the occasion of the biennial, which in the eyes of
... many locals was largely a symbol of the new Russian
... elite. Why, for the first time ever, is the Putin govern-
... ment so interested in developing a relationship with

of test balloon and a fresh node in a proliferating sys-
... tem that spreads the positive values of interconnection,
... dialogue, and mutual exposure—didn't exactly coincide
... with a city that hasn't yet managed to synthesize its
... present and past into a coherent image. If the first
... Moscow Biennale gave us something to hope for, it's
... that future installments will take their cue from this
... one's multiple gaps and slippages, and build not toward
... a more efficient negotiation of cultural differences but
... rather unbuild a little, through a heightened questioning
... of the biennial's very format and function. New sparks
... seem to fly from colliding, not-yet-synchronized speeds.
... A biennial can show up anywhere, but it doesn't have to
... show up on time. □

John Kelsey is a New York-based writer and artist.

Next-Level Spleen

JOHN KELSEY



Steve McQueen, *Shame*, 2011.
35 mm, color, 101 minutes.
Brandon (Michael Fassbender).

FOR MOST ARTISTS TODAY, the laptop and phone have already supplanted the studio as primary sites of production. Early signs of this shift were evident in what became known as relational aesthetics, which, in retrospect, seems wrongly defined as a practice in which communal experience became the medium. It is more properly understood, rather, as a capitalist-realist adaptation of art to the experience economy, obviously, but also to the new productive imperative to go mobile, as a body and a practice. In other words, community declared itself a medium at

the very moment that it was laying itself open to displacements it could never survive. Meanwhile, exhibitions were planned on laptops, then dragged and dropped into institutions. Work took a discursive turn, meaning it was now efficiently distributable on a global scale. In the mid-1990s, the figure of the artist, too, seemed to undergo a decisive mutation: The Margiela-clad PowerBook user was more nomadic and adaptive than his antecedents, smoother and more agreeable, better organized and more instantly connected with other members of the burgeoning

creative class that had emerged on the front lines of economic deregulation. The contemporary artist now functioned as a sort of lubricant, as both a tourist and a travel agent of art, following the newly liberated flows of capital while seeming always to be just temping within the nonstop tempo of increasingly flexible, dematerialized projects, always just passing through. This was all vaguely political, too, in a Negrist sort of way that promoted the emancipatory possibilities of connection and communication, linking the new speed of culture to the “convivial”

spirit of everything relational. The mutation of the artist continued to follow its irrevocable logic until we eventually arrived at the fully wireless, fully precarious, Adderall-enhanced, manic-depressive, post- or hyperrelational figure who is more networked than ever but who presently exhibits signs of panic and disgust with a speed of connection that we can no longer either choose or escape. Hyperrelational aesthetics emerged between 9/11 and the credit crisis and so can be squarely situated in relation to the collapse of the neoliberal economy, or more accurately to the situation of its drawn-out living death, since neoliberalism continues to provide both the cause and the only available cure for its own epic failure.

No feasible—or even recognizable—form of political engagement appears on the hyperrelational horizon, and no real horizon either, so we engage speed itself, attempting to overflow given spaces of politics with the disruptive force of the leak. If relational art aestheticized community, it did so in a decadent way, reading Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* in the context of Thatcher's "There is no such thing as society" and Deleuze in advance of e-flux. For the postrelational artist, however, nothing is more detestable than smart, spreadable conviviality, because the problem now is that togetherness can no longer be experienced outside of aesthetics, and there's no more avoiding the fact that isolation has been systematically designed into connectivity. Nowadays, networks are referenced and theorized ad nauseam, but no longer with any utopian sentiments attached. Last year, we read about Twitter revolutions in the mainstream press at the same time that we skimmed journals such as *Collapse* and *Sic*, belated translations of *Tiqqun*, and the sci-fi novels of Maurice Dantec ("post-World" scenarios involving humans becoming modems, the terminal loss of language and bodies). There was also Occupy, which seemed like it could have been anything—a viral insurrection, an aggressively peopled kind of live-stream, a general strike—until it was surrounded by police and bogged itself down in democratic process. Still, a permanent fault line may have been produced in that moment, inasmuch as the return to normal hasn't been entirely convincing either.

The network-disgust that's experienced by even the most positive-minded artists today is captured in our continued abuse of the meme "LOL," which becomes ever more applicable in direct correlation to the degree that we overkill it and wear it out. Not even a word, the term itself performs the loss of language and of laughter, even. It's a disembodied and thus efficiently transmissible abbreviation of laughter that in its repetition seems to reveal both the ecstasy and the anxiety of our nonstop displacement within social media. An overwritten, highbrow press release

about networks may be LOL. Or a JPEG of a knowingly failed painting. But mostly LOL signals the amputation of laughter from the body and its recoding as the silent, poison-dart-like flight of a postword within a network. The more we abuse it, the more it functions as the postlaughter of wit minus bodies, always somehow aimed at the bad faith of postcommunal connectivity.

Back home after the opening of a summer group show about "networked painting" (at Zach Feuer Gallery in New York), I'm still getting my head around the exhibition's title, "Context Message." Aside from a possible reference to the *Kontext Kunst* context of the early 1990s and to whatever faded, vaguely LOL echoes it may be producing in the cybernetic noncontext of Berlin–New York now, mostly I'm thinking, What else could the message be but that networks have decidedly replaced context, and that the only critical option remaining is to present art today as a stomach digesting itself in public, in real time? Except that the stomach is a network and there is no more public, because cities are just conveniently impossible places to hang out while art pretends to finish itself off for good. In other words, it's a show about hyperrelational decadence in the age of high-speed connectivity, with real paintings by Michael Krebber, Merlin Carpenter, Jutta Koether, Bjarne Melgaard, and R. H. Quaytman, as well as by the next-generation gallerists and bloggers who keep these and other names vaguely viral while at the same time inflicting LOL degrees of insecurity on them, or on the notion of the artist profile, meanwhile casting serious doubt on the possibility of positively inhabiting something like a context or network (or city, for that matter). The other LOL message here is that "network" is both a critical hot topic and a shamelessly with-it way of selling paintings in this economic End of Days: Not only do you get this painting-thing, you also get everything it's connected to—a direct link to something like extrinsic value, the "general intellect" of an invisible postcommunity. It's difficult to say which of these artists is most favorably positioned within the self-terrorizing, self-trolling spiderweb of "Context Message," but the joke we're all in on has to do with how paranoid and insecure the artist has become within the non-context we've inherited from relational aesthetics, the LOL thing to do with this feeling being to reblog it as painting.

Baudelairean spleen—or disgust as a poetic channel—was always connected to an idea of modern beauty, was maybe even its preferred medium. Any channeling of beauty today would have to occur in relation to crisis and the sublime of viral insecurity. The outmoding of the studio and possibly even of the artist herself, as we deliver our human capaci-



Above: View of "Context Message," 2012, Zach Feuer Gallery, New York. From left: Trevor Shimizu, *Spa Castle Detail*, 2010; Trevor Shimizu, *Spa Castle*, 2010; Lola Pettway, *Housetop Medallion*, 2004; Martin Kippenberger, *Koln's Flocken*, ca. 1980; Elaine Reichel, *Sampler (Othello)*, 2001; Ull Hohn, *Untitled*, 1993; Nicolas Guagnini, *Responsive Eye (Bridget 7)*, 2012.



Michael Krebber and Tyler Dobson, *Bad Joke Painting 1*, 2010–12, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 40".

ties over to network speed, provides the strange new conditions under which any coming aesthetics must emerge. So we will have to make poetry of the fact that language does not survive speed. Wasn't Paul Virilio already approaching something like an art of speed and catastrophe in books such as *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* (1980) and *The Accident of Art* (2005)? The poststudio has become the non-site of production as circulation, with some sort of artist plugged into it. Via this connection, the figure of the artist herself dematerializes, becomes a profile—viral, bloggable, friendable, and defrienable—her most abstract work being herself, or her own connectivity. And there's no way to separate the mobilization of this abstract, disappearing artist from the wider, systemic (and some would say anthropological) crisis we are living through now: The two phenomena are linked to the same automatisms, installed within the same futureless no-time of cybernetworks. We wonder whether art is possible after Facebook (and, for that matter, whether even Facebook is possible after Facebook). If the artist

Next-level spleen is the affective register of undecidable friendship within the hyperrelational networks that enmesh us so ex-intimately today, in this panicked, postlaughter moment of blogger terror.

today is a sort of “friend,” she always already includes the possibility of being a nonfriend or a bad friend. Next-level spleen, in other words, is also linked to the threat of defriending that’s implicit in friending. It’s the affective register of undecidable friendship within the hyperrelational networks that enmesh us so ex-intimately today, in this panicked, postlaughter moment of blogger terror. Networks are themselves delirious, paranoid structures; we all know that they can be a medium for betrayal, too.

Some recent movies deploy characters who could be stand-ins for the postrelational artist. There is Michael Fassbender’s depressive sexaholic in *Shame*, who connects with all New York women while retreating into ever more harrowing experiences of remoteness and narcissistic exile. There are the high-speed couples of last year’s nearly identical

rom-coms *Friends with Benefits* and *No Strings Attached*, who detach in order to connect more efficiently, constructing a handy iCouple within the no-time of the metropolitan interface. There’s also Charlize Theron’s alcoholic teen-romance writer in *Young Adult*, who, when she ventures out of the solitary confinement of her high-rise home office, is confronted with the fact that real-life connection is no longer available to her: She (or the world, or adulthood) is already too far gone. All of these cases involve successful professionals exiled in the midst of their own hyperrelational activities, who’ve lost the possibility of experiencing otherness except in the banal, flattened-out terms of the screen profile, who can only interface and data roam, whether online or in bed. The abstraction of the body within the screen-like void of the social is performed by actors who seem to Skype their gestures and tweet their lines, reformatting acting for the windowlike stages of Net space. These are performances of distributed affect.

If to work and communicate as artists today is to extend this cybercapitalist desolation and contribute to the dis-ease of metropolitan togetherness, it seems inevitable that we’ve arrived at a splenetic experience of abstraction. Whatever community we share now is the one that constantly sabotages itself: the anti-community of networked souls. Franco Berardi and others have written about a depressive epidemic that’s both symptomatic of and structurally integral to capitalism’s development as an info-sphere, to economic deregulation under conditions of high-speed exchange. The posthuman speed of circulation means that the world now escapes our capacity for attention and that we’ve lost our time for otherness, and therefore for ourselves. Under the present dispensation, *connection* is defined as the functional relationship between formatted materials or components. Via networks, human relations are reformatted to the pure syntax of the operating system. In other words, bodies become desingularized as time and attention are extracted (fracked) from the living person. And as a defensive reflex, we disconnect in the midst of communication, meaning we depress ourselves, shut down, make time. The title of Berardi’s book *The Soul at Work* (2009) suggests a sequel: *The Soul on Strike*, in which individualized depressions would link up to form a channel or medium for a radical interruption. Occupy depression?

The networked artist starts from the fact of being a human medium for metropolitan circulation and a modem for largely ungovernable cybercapitalist processes. Normally, when everything’s running smoothly, media disappear on us, retreating into their own efficiency, but in times of crisis they become strangely perceptible again. Systemic crisis could be a mirror for hallucinating the artist as



Above: Will Gluck, *Friends with Benefits*, 2011, digital video, color, 109 minutes. Jamie Rellis (Mila Kunis) and Dylan Harper (Justin Timberlake).



Above: Ivan Reitman, *No Strings Attached*, 2011, 35 mm, 108 minutes. Adam Franklin (Ashton Kutcher) and Emma Kurtzman (Natalie Portman).

Below: View of “Stewart Uoo: Life Is Juicy,” 2012, 47 Canal, New York. From left: *Don’t Touch Me (Oil Spill)*, 2012; *Don’t Touch Me (Bikrahm Yoga)*, 2012; *Confessions (9Women)*, 2012. Photo: Joerg Lohse.



channel, the screen that reveals the extent to which our practices are the crisis too. We get the feeling that we haven't truly begun to inhabit networks, that more ecstatic and catastrophic modes of interconnection remain to be tested. *Concatenation* is a term that sometimes comes to mind when trying to describe the creativity of machinic processes. As our activities continue to concatenate with programs and networks, the production of works seems less and less the result of individual artists' creative efforts and more like a swarming, hivelike way of doing and making whereby our gestures become inseparable not only from those of others but from the automatisms that allow us to interface—with our own work and with one another. How can we proceed from the feeling that our works already dispossess and excommunicate us as artists and persons? And what comes after the realization that contemporary artists no longer hold a monopoly on creativity? Everything seems to suggest that the only way for artists to survive their own precarity is by taking it to the limit, risking their own definition. Inventing the gestures that outrun and scramble our own ontological coordinates, overflowing preset subjective and productive formats, we work toward unleashing otherness within communication, and communication beyond the profile.*

As it mobilizes and gains speed, art becomes a lot more like what literature once was (which is a strange thought now, when literature is itself being superseded by digital culture): In its time, literature was a massive info leak that eroded disciplinary hierarchies, overflowing national borders and property lines alike. Why should art remain confined to the channel of the artist, the gallery, and the object? Relational aesthetics was probably already asking the same question, but not in a convincing way. As technological processes concatenate with human desires, producing mutations that always seem to occur at the outer limits of both the inhabitable city and our own capacity for attention, to disconnect while leaking could be a hyperrelational attitude. Spleen, that resistant affect which remains when all others have been channeled as productive labor, surrounds networks but won't be put to work in them. Avoiding both formats and employment, spleen makes time for the artist after the artist. □

JOHN KELSEY IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF *ARTFORUM*.

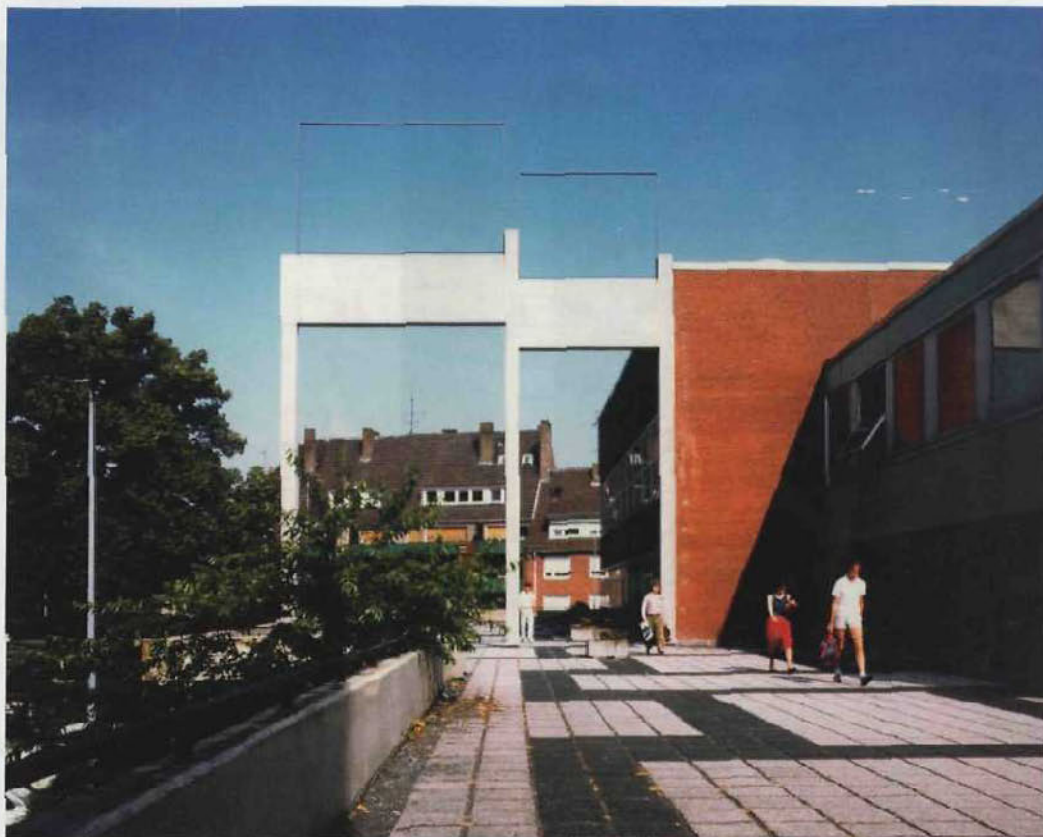
* For example, in the press release for "Life Is Juicy," Stewart Uoo's exhibition this past summer at 47 Canal in New York, the artist and his cowriter, Juliana Huxtable, narrate an experience of identity and gender mutation via the avatars of ultraviolent video games. Here, man-machine concatenation unleashes a fearsome cyber-vagina that goes to war against phallic order and doubles as a strategy for seducing real-world boys. Peopled with charred, shredded mannequins that translate his digital heroines into sculptural terms, Uoo's exhibition maps an ecstatic, chaotic space in between that of the gallery and the game, via a narrative that reboots bodily human time within screen time.

MEDIA STUDY

ISA GENZKEN

ABC

MY FIRST OUTDOOR SCULPTURE (CONCRETE, STEEL, 48' 9" X 36' 9" X 16", EXTENSION TO THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY IN MÜNSTER, GERMANY), SKULPTUR PROJEKTE MÜNSTER, 1987



Titles (selection):

Jeder braucht mindestens ein Fenster, 1992

Fuck the Bauhaus, 2000

Sesam Öffne Dich!, 2009

In Honour of Jasper Johns and Myself, 2011